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Understanding Student Disengagement within a Caribbean Context

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

**Centre for Research in Education and
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------------|---|
| BM | Behaviour Manager |
| CEE | Common Entrance Examination |
| CEO | Chief Education Officer |
| CXC | Caribbean Examination Council |
| FLE | Family Life Education |
| GCSE | General Certificate of Secondary Education |
| HOY | Head of Year |
| IB | Introduction to Business |
| IS | Integrated Science |
| IT | Information Technology |
| MOE | Ministry of Education |
| OECS | Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States |
| PE | Physical Education |
| POA | Principles of Accounts |
| PSP | Play Station Portable |
| SES | Socioeconomic Status |
| SS | Social Studies |
| TD | Technology Drawing |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| US | United States |

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ABSTRACT

Previous research on disengagement has usually treated it as 'disorderly', 'disruptive' or 'deviant' behaviour. As a result, the varied and subtle ways in which disengagement may be manifested at school have been overlooked. This thesis seeks to draw on insights from the interactionist tradition to explain how forms of disengagement are displayed within various situations and the diverse factors that may engender it. These issues are explored in the distinctive context of the Caribbean.

The research was undertaken at a secondary school in St. Lucia and ethnographic methods were used to understand students' actions, along with their interpretations, explanations and evaluations of themselves and their circumstances. Hence, the research relied on a range of data sources including lesson observations, informal interviews, and questionnaires. Personal and official documents were also analysed. Moreover, the perspectives of teachers and parents were used to enhance and corroborate students' experiences.

The research revealed that students engaged in different forms of both quiet and disruptive disengagement, either on an individual basis or as collective acts. In order to explain these, I examined the demands made on them by teachers, home concerns, as well as peer-related and other institutional factors. A major finding of this research is that while many students expressed a positive orientation to school, they engaged in diverse behaviours which amounted to forms of quiet disengagement. This is important because of its likely consequences for their educational development and subsequent life chances.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Disengagement among young people is widely believed to be a growing problem in many countries, and it is seen as having a detrimental effect on students' progress and performance as well as on teacher-pupil relations (Ravet, 2007). For instance, a review of research in nine European countries suggested that young people's disengagement from education and learning has been recognised as a 'shared concern' (Kendall and Kinder, 2005). Likewise, in relation to the United States, Marks (2000) claimed that 'disengagement is still a pervasive problem in US secondary schools where chronic disengagement reportedly afflicts 40%-60% of students, an estimate that excludes repeated absentees and dropouts' (p. 156). This view is echoed by Smyth (2006) who argues that 'students are switching off, tuning out and dropping out of high school in the USA and most other western countries at alarming rates' and that 'reformers are at a complete loss as to what to do' (p. 285). With reference to the UK, McIntosh and Houghton (2005) argue that 'there remains a hard core of [young] people who seem resistant to all efforts to engage in learning and these seriously disengaged [students] seem to be impervious to change' (p. 9).

It has sometimes been thought that the problem of disengagement is confined to the developed countries, but there is evidence that it is now found in parts of the developing world. My personal impression prior to this research, from my teaching tenure in the Caribbean and the UK, was that Caribbean schools appeared to have comparatively less disciplinary problems than those in the UK. Indeed, the image of education in the Caribbean has often been of strong

commitment on the part of both parents and children, and strong discipline exercised by teachers. Thus, it has been argued that in Caribbean classrooms strict discipline is maintained so that children grow up to expect punishment rather than reasoning when infractions are committed (Cummings et al., 1983: 492). However, there are now signs of significant change in this respect.

Thus, Ezenne and Mills (2003) argue that 'in many developing countries, the schools, which were once the context for positive values and character building, have now become sites for indiscipline, antisocial behaviour, discourtesy and even violence' (p. 124). With regard to Jamaica, Ezenne (2008) maintains that 'classroom disruptions appear to have increased in recent times, and they are now the most difficult problems facing teachers and school administrators in the school and the classroom (p. 348). Along the same lines, Evans (2006) reports that:

Many students who come from poor working class families and who live in communities rife with violence, conflict, frustration and stress often find it difficult to behave appropriately in schools. For some, their experiences have produced accustomed behaviours that are not sanctioned by the school. (Evans, 2006: 27-28)

In the case of Trinidad, Gowrie (2008) contends that student indiscipline has become an 'alarming' problem' and is seen as 'one of the major obstacles to effective teaching and learning' (p. 353). In a similar way, Thompson (2009) acknowledges that disruptive behaviour is of growing concern to teachers in Barbados, suggesting that 'it impinged on the quantity and quality of education delivered and received' (p. 43). Overall, Merrill (2003) declares that 'many schools throughout the Caribbean are in serious crisis': 'bewildered and despairing teachers complain that academic lethargy and lack of discipline in our schools have become epidemic' (p. 3).

There is a considerable psychological literature dealing with the issue of disengagement, explaining variations in its level in terms of a variety of factors. Most of this has focused on the secondary level, corresponding to the period of adolescence. It is generally accepted that adolescence is seen as a precarious stage where young people often struggle to come to terms with their situation as they concurrently strive to construct their sense of self and cope with developmental pressures characteristic of puberty. A prevailing view is that engagement in school is related to optimal human development (Marks, 2000:155) particularly for adolescents (Ryan and Patrick, 2001: 439). Thus, disengagement is exacerbated during the period of adolescence when individuals face multiple problems (Garnier et al., 2007). This suggests that many challenges, including the onset of adolescence, may all combine to promote student disengagement (Balfanz et al., 2007). In a review of this literature Black (2006) pointed to writers who suggested that students' satisfaction with learning and school work comes to a head in Year 9 and Year 10 and many students experience what Cole (2006) calls a 'mid school crisis' characterised by 'passivity or cessation of effort, underachievement, or lowered achievement, disruptive behaviour, poor attendance or leaving' (p. 5).

Within the sociological literature on education, the term 'disengagement' is much less frequently used, but there is a substantial body of work on pupil deviance in schools that is relevant to the topic. My work here draws substantially upon this sociological literature. However, almost all of the work on disengagement has been carried out in the US and the UK, and there has been very little investigation of the issue in Caribbean societies. What there has been has focused on disengagement in the more developed countries of the Caribbean (Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana and Barbados), but there has been very little in the lesser developed countries of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) namely, British Virgin Islands,

Anguilla, Antigua-Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, and St Vincent and the Grenadines. This research focuses on the nature of disengagement in one of these smaller territories namely, St. Lucia, and is therefore exploring new ground. At the same time, as already indicated, the theoretical and methodological issues it addresses have much wider relevance.

The approach adopted in this thesis is an ethnographic one. There has been very little work of this kind carried out in Caribbean schools. One of the few examples is Hyacinth Evans' (2006) book 'Inside Hillview High School: An Ethnography of an Urban Jamaican School. Evans' research focused on 'the examination of education, schooling, adolescent development and academic achievement' (2006: 1). She carried out her study in a Grade Nine class in a secondary school, which was a streamed class with students of mixed ability which was chosen by the school. During the field work period, Evans made frequent visits to the research site during an entire academic year and six months. She saw disengagement in terms of student class background and community experiences. Additionally, Evans acknowledged disengagement to be a precursor to low or under achievement and a stage preceding eventual school dropout.

1.1 Education in the Caribbean and specifically in St. Lucia

Education has long been highly valued in the Caribbean as a means of academic success and upward mobility and improving the standard of living (Fergus, 1993; Leacock, 2009). It has also been important for the re-establishment of societies previously operating under colonial rule (Comitas, 1991). In this context,

it has been regarded as a means of social transformation and for the establishment of national identity (Nettleford, 1991). These educational ideals are widely accepted throughout Caribbean societies and are frequently supported and emphasised in both homes and schools (Murray and Gbedemah, 1983).

The majority of Caribbean societies developed as slave colonies by European nations to supply primary products for the European market between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries (King, 1987). During the colonial era, the provision of formal education for the slave population was the exception rather than the rule (Miller, 1996: 13) and the wealthier planters sent their children to Europe to be educated, or made use of private tutors (King, 1987). However, the abolition of slavery in 1838 was accompanied by the establishment of mass free schooling (first elementary and much later secondary education) available to all groups. Thus, the emancipation of slaves brought with it the development of education as a means of social and economic development and social mobility, and the post-emancipation period saw the gradual reform of education systems inherited from the colonial period. The aim of the reform was to transform the system of education that had developed under colonial rule and to provide equal educational opportunities for all (King, 1991).

While, by the 1950s, the education system had been changed considerably since the colonial period, it was marked by several distinctive characteristics related to the socioeconomic structure of Caribbean societies (Miller, 1996:15). In particular, it was felt that educational policies, programmes, structures and systems still reflected colonial ideals. The gaining of political independence by most territories was accompanied by attempts in individual countries to make their educational systems more reflective of the needs of individual countries (Fergus,

1993). Consequently, there was a move away from the inherited academic syllabi of the colonial power to the establishment of a curriculum offering a combination of academic, vocational and technical subjects to equip individuals with skills germane to the practical pursuits of the territories (Nettleford, 1991). The restructuring of the educational system also involved the employment of traditional pedagogic practices in the deliverance of the stipulated curriculum. Although there were variations in the teaching techniques, the prevailing methods were lecturing, note taking and classroom exercises, an approach which students appear to be accustomed to (Evans, 1999). It has been argued that this traditional, teacher-led, whole-class oriented approach may still be a common practice in many Caribbean schools (Warrican et al., 2008).

St Lucia gained political independence from the colonial powers on February 22nd, 1979. Nevertheless, as in the rest of the Caribbean, the first organized system of education emerged in St. Lucia after the abolition of slavery, with the early schools being largely overseen by the Anglican, Methodist and Roman Catholic churches¹. At the time of this study there were seventy-five primary schools, twenty-four secondary schools and one main tertiary institution on the island. To date, the church shares the management of the majority of schools with the Ministry of Education (MOE) although the government meets their operating costs and plays a dominant supervisory role (Education For All in the Caribbean (EFA) Assessment Report, 2000). Like most other Caribbean territories, compulsory schooling in St. Lucia begins at the age of five years and lasts until the age of 16 years. Students are expected to spend seven years in primary school before proceeding to the secondary school level where they spend an additional five years. However,

¹ Additional information on the nature and history of education in St. Lucia can be found on the following two websites: <http://www.stats.gov.lc/edigest.pdf>
http://www.education.gov.lc/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=119&Itemid=48

students are required to take a common entrance examination (CEE) at the end of their primary education and the results from this test are used to determine the secondary school to which they are assigned (EFA Assessment Report, 2000; Leacock, 2009:24).

The school system in the island does not operate on a zoning policy and, in practice, students from any part of the island could choose to attend a secondary school of their choice provided that they had obtained the required entry scores. Parents and their children express up to five choices as to which secondary school they would like to attend. In selecting the schools, different criteria are applied which give rise to different hierarchies of choices. Some of the criteria used by parents and children include area of residence, location of the school, parental income and wealth, type of school (whether government or church-managed) as well as the reputation of the school. In this regard, there is a tendency for parents and students to put one or two of a small number of schools as the top choices wherever they live. Hence, in a sense, schools are ranked by the public through the hierarchies of choices that parents and students make, and the scores allocated to schools tend to reproduce these hierarchies of choices. In this way, school places are filled up on the basis of whether a student chose it and how well they performed in the CEE.

Universal secondary education was implemented in St. Lucia in 2006 with the aim of eliminating the CEE and guaranteeing all students a place at a secondary school. Until the advent of this policy, students who were unsuccessful at the CEE were allowed to complete their education at a senior primary school or, in a few cases, they repeated the final grade in primary school to secure a higher entry score. However, to date, the abolition of the CEE that was meant to occur with the advent of universal secondary education has yet to be realised.

The average age of entry into secondary school is eleven years. Although students spend five years at secondary school, they may be allowed to repeat a year group if the school or parents feel that their performance during the year was unsatisfactory. At the end of their secondary school education students are required to sit examinations administered by the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) or other equivalent examination board. Students who are successful in meeting the College entrance requirements (normally passes in five subjects including English and Mathematics) may be accepted to pursue further studies at the island's main tertiary institution, Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, or other associate institutions.

1.2 Research Aims

This study sought to use an interactionist-based ethnography to examine the nature of adolescent students' disengagement within the context of St. Lucia. It explored the different forms that disengagement took and the various factors that engendered it. The research was based on the following two interrelated questions:

1. What are the various ways in which students' disengagement in secondary school is manifested?
2. What are the various factors that influenced forms of disengagement at school?

The first question was concerned with the different ways that students withdraw their attention from the main lesson as it is unfolding and perhaps

concurrently engage in acts of classroom deviance. Here, disengagement is seen not as a quality inherent in students but as behaviours that students display within particular interactional contexts. In order to discover students' taken-for-granted ways of behaving and how these vary in different contexts, the research sought to examine the subtle ways in which forms of disengagement occurred and to analyse the complexity of students' disengagement through the use of methods that captured the perspectives and strategies of the participants. However, students' situated behaviours are not isolated acts but behaviours manifested in response to the actions of others, triggered to some extent by other contextual factors. Hence, the second question was concerned with the factors that contribute to the manifestations of forms of disengagement either individually or as collective acts.

1.3 Résumé of the Chapters

In Chapter Two, I explore the theoretical debates regarding disengagement in a review of the existing psychological and sociological literature. Chapter Three presents a conceptual structure for understanding student disengagement. In view of the definitional and measurement issues that characterised much of the current research literature, I draw on Goffman's (1961; 1963) analysis of interaction order and proposed two frameworks for describing forms of disengagement.

After discussing the theoretical framework of this study, Chapter Four presents the rationale for the research methodology. Additionally, it provides a reflective account of the methods and procedures used for collecting and analysing the data. In particular, I explain methodological issues, and practical dilemmas

encountered while conducting the research. I also outline the method of analysing the data based on grounded theorising. Chapter Five presents the findings from the ethnographic data on the various forms that students' disengagement takes and discusses these in relation to the proposed conceptual frameworks and the extant literature.

In Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, I examine the factors that seemed to contribute to the disengagement manifested by students, drawing particularly on the experiences of eight core informants. Whilst Chapter Six and Seven focus on school-related factors, Chapter Eight examines non-school-related factors. Chapter Six examines teacher-student relations, in particular students' expectations of teacher behaviour that influence disengagement. I also consider how other institutional factors may influence students' perspectives and strategies. Chapter Seven looks at the effect of peer relations and Chapter Eight focuses on the relationship between home-related factors and student disengagement. Chapter Nine draws together the conclusions of the thesis. In this final chapter I present a summary of the main research findings. I also consider the research contribution, the methodological issues and limitations of the study. The chapter ends with recommendations for the future direction of research.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORISING STUDENT DISENGAGEMENT

2.1 Introduction

Over the years there has been considerable educational research on student disengagement, within both the psychological and sociological traditions. Whereas psychological approaches have focused on the characteristics and behaviour of individuals, sociological approaches have tended to focus on school and classroom processes. In the sections that follow I will examine some of the work carried out within these two traditions, ending with an exploration of the implications of symbolic interactionism for understanding student disengagement.

2.2 Psychological Theories of Student Disengagement

The psychological perspective on student disengagement tends to emphasise causes relating to the development of children and adolescents and individual differences among them. Student deviance tends to be viewed as abnormal and the deviant student as a maladjusted individual. Thus, the focus is on identifying the nature and scope of students' maladaptive learning behaviour by examining the inherited personal characteristics and home backgrounds of students. However, there is a range of psychological theories purporting to explain student disengagement involving diverse conceptualisations of the issue.

The terms 'engagement' and 'disengagement' have been used in many ways, within the psychological literature, and have been open to various interpretations. For example, both have been used as overarching terms to examine students' relationships (behaviour, attitudes, values) to their academic pursuits (Hockings et al., 2008; McMillan, 2003), to education (McIntosh and Houghton, 2005), to learning (Marks, 2000) and to the school (Balfanz et al., 2007; Broadhurst et al., 2005); and researchers have used the prefixes of 'academic', 'educational', 'student' and 'school' to convey these relations. Sometimes the term 'engagement' has been interpreted as relating to issues of 'attachment', 'bonding', 'connectedness' (Libbey, 2004), 'identification', 'participation', 'motivation' and 'membership' (Glanville and Wildhagen, 2007). Additionally, engagement has been conceptualised as (a) 'the attention, interest, investment and effort students expend in the work of learning' (Marks, 2000:155), as (b) 'students' behavioural and psychological involvement in the school curriculum' (Glanville and Wildhagen 2007: 1021) or even as (c) 'a process of participation in school as an ongoing process' (Fine, 1989:133). By contrast, disengagement has been substituted for terms such as 'withdrawal' (Fine, 1989), 'disconnection' (McMillan, 2003; Smyth and Fasoli, 2007) and 'disidentification' (Fredricks et al., 2004; Libbey, 2004; Osbourne, 1997). Furthermore, disengagement has been perceived as (a) 'the process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations, reducing effort and involvement at school, and withdrawing from a commitment to school and to school completion' (Balfanz et al., 2007: 224); as (b) 'the process of detaching the global self from the academic domain' (Regner and Loose, 2006) or simply (c) 'the lack of motivation to study and learn' (Black, 2004). In these terms 'disengagement' is conceived as the antithesis of engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Marks, 2000; Perdue et al., 2009; McIntosh and Houghton, 2005; Smyth, 2006). However, it is also frequently seen as overlapping in meaning with other constructs such as

'alienation' (Libbey, 2004; Fredricks et al., 2004), 'disaffection' (Skinner et al., 2009) and 'withdrawal' (Glenville and Wildhagen, 2007).

Other writers draw a sharp distinction between disengagement and other concepts like disaffection. For instance, Smith et al. (2005) (cited in Morris and Pullen 2007:10) differentiate between disaffection (no longer seeing the purpose of learning) and disengagement (having lost connection with the learning process). Moreover, while some writers see disengagement as the converse of engagement (Bryson and Hand, 2007; Hockings et al., 2008), others use the term disaffection instead to convey this opposition (Skinner et al., 2009). There are also researchers who have identified disengagement as one of many types of behaviour that is subsumed under the umbrella term of disaffection. For example, Holroyd and Armour (2003) argue that disaffection can be manifested in various ways including disengagement from mainstream activities, disruptive or anti social behaviour and involvement in petty crime. Likewise, Nardi and Steward (2003: 345) see "quiet and invisible" disengagement as a tacit, non-disruptive form of disaffection. Furthermore, Riley and Docking (2004) perceive 'disengagement with the curriculum' as one manifestation of disaffection, which they regard as disenchantment with schooling. To them, disaffection can be expressed in terms of a sense of dissatisfaction with various aspects of the school such as standards of behaviour as well as teaching and learning. Consequently, they see disengagement in terms of students' responses to the teaching which they receive, for instance through their non-participation in class tasks. Similarly, Skinner et al. (2009) define disaffection in terms of students' lack of behavioural and emotional participation in the classroom. They distinguish between two components of disaffection, namely, disaffected behaviour and disaffected emotions (p. 495) and use the term 'disengagement' to refer to the core behavioural dimension of students' disaffection (p. 496).

The proliferation of competing conceptualisations, displaying a lack of consensus about the definition, measurement and operationalisation of the terms 'engagement' and 'disengagement', has been a growing concern for researchers and academics within the psychological tradition (Appleton et al., 2008; Glanville and Wildhagen, 2007; Libbey, 2004). Thus, Perdue et al. (2009) remark that 'part of the difficulty inherent in studying engagement lies in the fact that there is not a specific agreed upon definition for this construct' (p. 1084). Likewise, Libbey (2004) contends that 'the various terms have created an overlapping and confusing definitional spectrum' (p. 274), while Fredricks et al. (2004) assert that 'currently engagement is theoretically messy; sometimes it overlaps with other constructs, sometimes it simply substitutes different terminology for the same constructs, and sometimes it incorporates constructs from other literature in very general rather than precise ways' (p. 84.) These authors maintain that current definitions of (dis)engagement have incorporated such a wide variety of constructs that the term now 'suffers from being everything to everybody' (ibid). Moreover, in terms of concept operationalisation, Glanville and Wildhagen (2007) argue that there is no single standardised measure of engagement. Appleton et al. (2008) also highlight the seriousness of this issue when they assert that: 'the body of theoretical or research literature on engagement generally reflects little consensus about definitions and contains substantial variations in how engagement is operationalized and measured (p. 370).

Apart from the definitional and operationalisation issues, psychological research on disengagement has been subjected to methodological criticisms. For example, such research has been criticised for its tendency to use variables that focus too narrowly on the individual student and which effectively assign blame and responsibility to the student (Vibert and Shield, 2003: 226). In this regard, Fredricks

et al. (2004) maintained that 'current measures do not tap qualitative differences in the level of engagement' and that 'it is difficult to ascertain to what extent engagement is a function of individual or context factors' (p. 69).

2.3 Sociological Theories of Student Disengagement

While the sociological perspective has made a significant contribution to the analysis of student disengagement, this has been framed in the broader terms of student deviance from or adaptation to school values and norms. Specific approaches important in this regard include subcultural theories, adaptational theories, resistance theories and interactionist theories.

2.3.1 Subcultural Theories of Student Disengagement

The subcultural theories draw primarily on the work of Cohen (1955) and Miller (1958), who were concerned with explaining patterns of delinquency and crime. Cohen's work is an integration of ideas from earlier sociological theory, most notably Merton's theory of anomie, concerned with how mismatches between socially valued goals and opportunities to pursue them generate deviance, and Edwin Sutherland's (1947) differential association theory, which is based on the premise that individuals learn to become deviant through association with others who are already deviant. Cohen emphasised the social nature of the adaptations of particular groups of people and developed the concept of delinquent subculture (p. 13). He argued that some working-class boys were excluded from attaining middle-class values as they were unable to access the necessary resources to succeed (p.

73). This problem of adjustment produced a psychological response he termed 'status frustration' (p. 136). Consequently, through a process called 'reaction formation'², these young people invert the dominant middle class values in order to create valued identities for themselves (p. 128) and develop a group solution where they devised their own system of values and ways of behaving in terms of which they can succeed. Thus, their adaptation takes the form of the development of a subculture centred on alternative values that fit their needs, this often involving non-utilitarian crime, malicious acts, forms of instant gratification and great emphasis on group loyalty. This subculture confers status on them when they conform to its values.

Whereas Cohen and Merton assumed that individuals in society were initially committed to the dominant middle class values, Miller argued that working-class communities have their own cultural values into which new members are socialised. Hence, for Miller, delinquency results entirely from conformity to working-class culture. He claimed that 'there is a segment of American society whose way of life, values and characteristic patterns of behaviour are the product of a distinctive, cultural system' (1958:6). As such, Miller was of the view that the lower class culture produced deviance because its values were naturally at odds with those of the middle class. Miller argued that through the socialisation patterns of the working-class, its members adhered to six focal concerns. These are defined as 'areas or issues which command widespread and persistent attention and a high degree of emotional involvement' (p. 6). Additionally, the focal concerns are conceived as dimensions within which a fairly diverse range of behaviour patterns can be pursued in different situations and, consequently, they are ranked in order of 'explicit attention given to them' (p. 7). Miller identified the following focal concerns:

² This is an idea derived from Freud's psychoanalytic theory

- a) Trouble: valuing law-violating behaviour
- b) Toughness: e.g. physical prowess, masculinity, bravery
- c) Smartness: e.g. ability to outsmart, gaining money by 'wits'
- d) Excitement: e.g. thrill, risk, danger
- e) Fate: being lucky
- f) Autonomy: freedom from external constraint and authority, independence

Each of these six concerns is seen as being on the extreme end of a continuum of behaviours available to the working-class communities. However, they are given primary emphasis within those communities.

In the sociology of education, the subcultural approach was exemplified by the work of Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981)³. These researchers focus on students' responses to the inequalities produced by certain features of the internal organisation of the school, and teachers' behaviour in the classroom. Hargreaves (1967) studied the effects of the process of streaming at Lumley School, a boys' secondary modern school in the north of England. Lacey (1970) examined a similar process at Hightown Grammar, a boys' grammar school, while Ball (1981) focused on the effects of banding, setting and mixed ability at Beachside Comprehensive, a non-selective secondary school. In all three studies, the researchers showed that the process of differentiating students on the basis of academic performance and behaviour led to a polarisation of students' attitudes to school which developed into opposing subcultures among students. Students placed in the top stream or higher bands tended to exhibit attitudes, behaviours and

³ A similar approach was seen in the work of Lambart (1976, 1997, 1982) and the focus on the differentiation-polarisation thesis was subsequently developed by Abraham (1989; 1995).

values expected by the school. In contrast, those in the lower streams and bands⁴ tended to develop subcultures where they inverted the school's values, or drew on alternative values. Hence, these subcultural values were oriented towards deviance and were characterised by a negative orientation to school.

For example, Hargreaves identified two subcultures in the year group studied, what he called the academic and delinquent subcultures. The first was characterised by positive orientation towards the values promoted by the school and the teachers. The delinquent subculture was characterised by anti-academic values and a negative orientation towards the school (see Table 2.1 below).

Table 2.1: Two subcultures in a secondary modern school

| | | | |
|----------|----|------------|----|
| Academic | | | |
| 4A | 4B | 4C | 4D |
| | | Delinquent | |

Source Hargreaves 1967: 163

Thus, the majority of boys in the lower streams constituted the delinquent subculture and they were considered failures by the school on two counts: they had entered neither the grammar school nor the top streams in the secondary modern school (1967: 169). Hargreaves argued that their being labelled failures led to 'status frustration', followed by reaction formation whereby they inverted school values. However, within their subculture, those who lived up to anti-school values were held in high esteem by fellow members (1967: 171-172).

⁴ The misbehaviour of students in the bottom stream at Lumley Secondary School, 4E and lowest band Beachside Comprehensive School, Band III, was defined and dealt with in terms of emotional problems or maladjustment rather than violence.

Lacey's argument was very similar, though the emergent contrast between top and bottom streams was perhaps even more surprising in the grammar school, given that all the pupils had been high achievers and pro-school in their primary schools. He argued that in constructing an anti-academic orientation, students drew on resources available to them within their home communities. Thus, Lacey contended that working-class students who were generally assigned to lower streams adopted anti-school values and were drawn to deviant activities which reinforced their working-class values (p. 85-86). On the other hand, middle class students placed in lower streams found distinctive features in their cultural environment to create alternative identities, such as the student, Priestley, who became preoccupied with stock market values (p. 55-56). However, Ball (1981) showed that even with a change in academic organisation from banding to mixed ability groupings, there was still the tendency for working-class students to develop and be drawn towards an anti-school subculture (p. 278). This is because teachers were still inclined in every class situation to rank students academically and deal with them on the basis of their band membership.

One failing of the research using the subcultural model is that it focused primarily on the deviance manifested by males, by working-class students, or by those in the lower streams and bands. It tended to neglect the possibility of female deviance as well as deviance by those from the middle classes or in top academic ability groups (Davies, 1984; Furlong, 1985; Stanley, 1986; Turner, 1983). Likewise, the subcultural models have been criticised for their failure to acknowledge the variability in students' deviant behaviour (Furlong, 1985; Hammersley and Turner, 1984). For instance, Brown (1987) has argued that working-class responses to school cannot be understood simply in terms of either pupil acceptance or rejection of school values. Rather, it is possible that students are willing to make an effort in

school whilst questioning its purpose and value (1987:44). Furthermore, it has been suggested that deviants may conform on certain occasions while conformists may on particular occasions engage in deviant activities. In this regard, the pro-school/anti-school model has been inadequate in accounting for the range of behaviours classified as deviance and it does not capture the complex patterning of students' perspectives (Hammersley and Turner, 1984:162).

It has been suggested that the work of Hargreaves, Lacey and Ball is in keeping with a symbolic interactionist emphasis on social process and agency (Hillyard, 2010). The claim is that their research has focused on the internal working of the school while acknowledging the effects of structural forces at play. However, in response to this claim, it has been argued that at the time when Hargreaves, Lacey and Ball conducted their research, their work did not conform to the distinctive theoretical and methodological features of symbolic interactionism which were being developed then (Hammersley, 2011). These elements include: (a) the emphasis on how actions arise out of social interactions; (b) the diversity and context variability of social process and (c) the use of detailed qualitative analysis of interactional process in the classroom through methods such as participation observation, audio recordings and relatively unstructured interviews (p. 804).

2.3.2 Adaptational Theories of Student Disengagement

Adaptational models were one of the different approaches developed in response to the criticisms of the subcultural model. An adaptational model concerned with explaining social conformity and deviance was originally formulated by Merton (1938). Focusing on the United States, he explained deviance in terms of

individuals' responses to their positioning in relation to opportunities for achieving the goals into which US society socialised them, namely attaining high income, wealth and status. Merton argued that individuals had differential access to the approved means of attaining the goals of society. Where there was a discrepancy between the socially desired goals and the means to attain them, individuals experienced a structural strain and a situation of 'anomie arose'. Merton outlined a number of responses to this, and amongst these were certain kinds of crime and deviance. In doing this, he constructed a typology that differentiated between commitment to or rejection of these goals and the legitimate means of pursuing them (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: A typology of modes of individual adaptation

| | Modes of Adaptation | Culture goals | Institutionalised means |
|-----|---------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| I | Conformity | + | + |
| II | Innovation | + | - |
| III | Ritualism | - | + |
| IV | Retreatism | - | - |
| V | Rebellion | ± | ± |

KEY
 (+) = acceptance of values (-) = rejection of values
 (±) = rejection of old values and substitution of new values

Source: (Source: Merton, R. K. (1957) Social Theory and Social Structure, Glencoe: The Free Press p. 140)

Thus, Merton identified five modes of adaptation: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Conformists remain committed to the goals of society, pursuing them through adhering to the legitimate means (even if this proves unsuccessful). Innovative individuals pursue the goals of society through illegitimate means, and this is where crime and deviance arise most obviously. Ritualists have abandoned their commitment to the goals of society but remain committed to the

institutionalised means of gaining success. Retreatists are no longer committed to the goals of society or the means of achieving success but have found no alternatives. Rebellious individuals reject both the goals and the means of society and have replaced them with alternative goals and means.

Merton's model has been very influential, and has led to various modified and elaborated typologies, including in the field of education. One example is found in the work of Woods (1979)⁵. He used a revised typology in an effort to understand the range of adaptations that he found among pupils in a state secondary school in the 1970s. In developing his model, Woods extended the school's goals to include the broad institutional goals as well as the individual aims of teachers. 'Thus students may display varying responses to schools, teachers, and subjects and to certain aspects of teachers and topics with subjects' (p. 70). Additionally, Woods identified both the formal and informal means available to the students and argued that it would be more profitable to think of means in a personal rather than an institutional sense (ibid). He contended that students may vary in their responses according to variation in goals and means, and therefore there are different modes of adaptation depending on students' intentions (see Table 2.3).

⁵ Merton's model was reformulated by Harary (1966), later reworked by Wakeford (1969) and then revised by Woods.

Table 2.3: Woods' revised typology of modes of adaptation

| | | GOALS | | | | | |
|-------|-------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| | | Indifference | Indulgence | Identification | Rejection without replacement | Ambivalence | Rejection with replacement |
| MEANS | Indifference | Retreatism | | | | | |
| | Indulgence | | Ingratiation | <i>Ingratiation</i> | | | |
| | Identification | Ritualism | COMPLIANCE | <i>Compliance</i> | | | |
| | Rejection with replacement | Retreatism | | | Retreatism | | |
| | Ambivalence | Colonization | | | | OPPORTUNISM | |
| | Rejection without replacement | Intransigence | | | | | Rebellion |

Key
Capitals: typical of early years
Italics: typical of later years
Arrows: some typical movements

Source: Woods, P. (1979). The Divided School London: Routledge and Kegan Paul p. 78

Thus, in his revised typology, Woods included five modes of conformity⁶ as follows:

- a) Ingratiation- a strongly positive response to means and goals.
- b) Optimistic Compliance: goals are vaguely perceived but strongly adhered to.
- c) Instrumental compliance: a calculated adoption of means and goals where they serve the actor's purposes.
- d) Ritualism: accepts the norms of behaviour of the school but is indifferent to the goals.
- e) Opportunism: ambivalence towards both goals and means. Here, compliance is unstable.

⁶ Harary (1966) had previously reformulated Merton's model and introduced 'indifference' and 'ambivalence' as well as 'rejection' (with or without replacement) as possible reactions. Consequently, in developing this model, Wakeford (1969) identified five modes of adaptation namely conformity, retreatism, rebellion, colonization and intransigence (see Woods 1979:69).

Whereas most of the modes of adaptation applied to students at any stage of their school career, some forms of adaptation were more common in earlier or later school years.

In contrast to Merton's typology, which was based on the assumption that individuals exhibit stable forms of behaviour across different contexts, Woods' model highlighted overlaps and variability in the modes of adaptation. In this way, Woods' account provided a more complex and sophisticated model showing contextual variation in behaviour. He maintained that:

a student might adopt a dominant mode through his school life, oscillate back and forth between several modes of adaptation, or move through a series of modes in some sort of progression. Likewise, a student might employ one mode for a subject, a teacher or a particular context.

(Woods, 1979:78)

However, whereas Merton's typology of adaptations was based upon a relatively clear theory about value commitments and the effects of differential opportunity, Woods did not present any explanations for the adoption of particular modes. Thus, there has been a shift from an explanatory to a descriptive typology.

A further development of the adaptational model is seen in the work of Measor and Woods' (1984).⁷ Their research incorporated an analysis of students' perspectives and strategies thereby showing the resultant strategies students adopted in order to express their own particular orientations. Measor and Woods

⁷ A different line of approach is shown in the work of Brown (1987) who sought to highlight differential adaptations to the formal culture of the school through the use of an ends/means/conditions framework (1987:51-52). Accordingly, Brown characterised students into three groups, (namely, 'swots', 'rems' and 'ordinary kids') corresponding to particular orientations to school (namely normative, normative instrumental, and alienated instrumental respectively). Moreover, these pupil orientations were based on their acceptance of the academic or practical value system in operation at the school.

studied a single class of pupils during their transition from middle to secondary school. They argued that on arrival at secondary school all students presented themselves as conformist and demonstrated a commitment to school. However, within the first term the students began to re-establish the old identities that they had developed in their previous school. By the beginning of the third term there were three distinct categories of students displaying distinctive orientations to school, namely 'conformists', 'deviants' and 'knifedgers'. Students in each group engaged in developing particular strategies at school for their own benefit, with certain repeated forms of action becoming established among them. The students who were conformist adopted strategies such as working hard and being highly competitive. The deviant students engaged in gender-specific strategies. Deviant boys manifested behaviours such as publicly disruptive jokes; coming late; bunking off lessons; challenging school rules and use of subversive humour. However, the deviant girls used strategies such as 'displays' through the use of fashionable clothing along with decorating their books and pencil cases; daydreaming and 'work avoidance'. The 'knifedgers' adopted strategies that fell between the two extremes. As such, they worked hard but often concealed the work done and used deviant strategies in situations where there was minimal risk of being caught. The focus on the orientations of these three categories of students suggests that there seems to have been a move by Woods to a much simpler typology. Indeed, this later one seems to be a modified pro/anti school model which is perhaps closer to the kind of explanation that drove subcultural models.

The adaptational approach is not without its limitations. Furlong (1985) has identified the following drawbacks: it focuses almost exclusively on individual decision making with little consideration given to collective action; it ignores the process of negotiation occurring between students and teachers or among students

themselves, and it fails to show how actions are developed, elaborated and transformed. Additionally, Hammersley and Turner (1984) have questioned the assumption that pupil behaviour is based on the internalisation or rejection of official goals or values (p. 165). They contended that students respond to teacher behaviour rather than to abstract educational values. Thus, teachers may act differently towards different students and to the same student differently over the course of a particular lesson (ibid). Furthermore, Hammersley and Turner argued that the adaptational model, which focuses almost exclusively on goal-directed behaviour, ignores the significance of other factors which may partly influence students' behaviour such as latent identities as well as cultures that they may bring with them into school. In this regard, Turner (1983) maintained that the adaptational model has limited scope in analysing the complexity of students' deviance, since it is unable to sufficiently account for variation in pupil activity across different contexts as well as the motives behind pupils' behaviour.

2.3.3 Resistance Theories of Student Disengagement

Marxist investigations of student disengagement have been formulated in terms of student resistance. Thus, researchers have attempted to document struggle by working-class students against the norms or authority of school, showing that it often seems to work against their interests (Abowitz 2000). This examination of student resistance arose out of a concern that previous Marxist work on schooling had tended to imply that schools are successful in inculcating the attitudes and skills required for future participation in capitalist work relations. In other words, the focus had previously been on how the school system successfully reproduced the class structure and the capitalist system. Subsequently, however, researchers focused on resistance to this process, and there have been a number

of empirical studies along these lines that are relevant to my focus. The studies by Corrigan (1977), Willis (1977), Humphries (1981) and Anyon (1981) are all concerned with working-class resistance to school. These studies claimed to show that, in effect, the behaviour of young people often displayed a level of consciousness of their own class oppression: they deliberately used disruption and truancy as a means of defending themselves or fighting back (Furlong, 1985: 171).

The studies by Corrigan, Humphries and Willis examine how the resistance of British male working-class youths in elementary and secondary schools served to further perpetuate capitalist relations. Corrigan (1979) studied the life experiences of a group of ninety three 14-15 year-old working-class boys at two secondary schools. He was of the view that the education system did not provide the boys with the opportunity for attaining success in terms of society's values. As such, the boys had been placed in a series of contradictory positions expressed in terms of the power differentials between teachers and students (p. 46). Moreover, the youths had some clear ideas about the social relationships of exploitation and oppression that helped to create the contradictory demands placed on them at school (p. 153). Yet, they did not have either the consciousness or the political power to get out of this situation on their own (p. 153). Hence, they developed a consistent reaction to the use of power by teachers and, by extension, the state. Accordingly, their response took forms of misbehaviour that amounted to 'passive resistance' and 'non-cooperation' in the classroom. Their deviance ranged from 'truancy[skipping school]... seen as an extreme action; "dolling off"[skipping classes] as less extreme; "mucking about" as a major activity and "not paying attention" as [an] endemic' action (p. 45). However, Corrigan argued that the boys' deviance was not confined to the school, and that their leisure activities (football and pop music) played a vital role in the maintenance of their counter culture at school and on the street (p. 117). In this way

the boys were able to maintain 'a separate identity from those trying to mould their behaviour into more acceptable forms' (ibid).

Humphries' study also demonstrated students' resistance to the hegemonic cultural order. His study was concerned with the adult oral histories of working-class people's disruptive and delinquent behaviour as experienced between 1889 and 1939 (p. 3). The oral and documentary evidence suggested that resistance to authority experienced in the later part of the twentieth century seemed to have revealed a recurrence of deviant activities that were manifested in an earlier period with some degree of continuity (p. 1). Like Corrigan, Humphries argued that school was experienced as repressive and working-class youths organised themselves against the dominant order. Thus, in response to the contradictions and inequalities experienced most of their behaviour was seen as nascent articulation of class consciousness (p. 24, 238). Students' resistance was seen in conspicuous delinquent activities which included: 'disaffection from school work; classroom disobedience; school strikes; larking about; social crime; street-gang violence; rebellious sexual behaviour; absenteeism and acts of industrial sabotage' (p. 1). Humphries contended that forms of working-class resistance extended beyond the school to other spheres of life such as youth organisations, leisure activities, church and factory work (p. 140). In this regard, he argued that the 'persistent rule-breaking and opposition to authority characteristic of working-class youth culture' were expressions of resistance to 'powerful attempts to inculcate conformist modes of behaviour...through various bourgeois agencies of control, manipulation and exploitation' (p. 1). Additionally, Humphries asserted that the youths' experience of class relations in everyday life (i.e. home and work relations) had great significance in shaping the consciousness of the working-class. However, he maintained that despite working-class resistance, to some extent the school (through coercion, lack

of opportunity and absence of any alternative mode of education) achieved its purpose of reproducing and reinvigorating a class society (p. 61).

Willis' (1977) work demonstrated the use of an integrated Marxist-ethnographic approach to the study of male white working-class youth resistance. He examined how twelve non-academic, disaffected males in a working-class industrial town in the Midlands adapted to school and work (p. 2). Thus, Willis showed how the oppositional activities of the 'lads' helped in the creation of a subculture derived from their home background as well as the culture and work world of the working-class male adults in their neighbourhood. Willis was of the view that the 'most basic, obvious and explicit aspect of the counter-school culture was the entrenched general and personalised opposition to authority' (p. 11) which was mainly expressed in the 'apparent inversion of the school rules' (p. 12). In particular, this articulated resistance was seen in a variety of ways including truancy; 'having a laff'; being in class and doing no work; cultural styles such as alternative hairstyles and clothing as well as music; cigarette smoking; drinking alcohol; sexism; racism and antisocial practices including vandalism, fights and stealing. Willis argued that these acts of resistance were dismissed as deviant behaviours by those in institutional power. Nevertheless, the students' resistance did not win them legitimate power. Rather, it worked to further reinforce the maintenance of working-class under-privilege and the social reproduction of the capitalist working order. Willis maintained that it was 'the lads' working-class culture which provided the most influential guides for the future (p. 95) and most effectively prepared some of them for manual labour. Thus, the lads' counter-school culture had many similarities with the shop-floor culture (p. 52) and their resistance helped to ensure that they got working-class, rather than middle-class, jobs like previous generations. In this regard, Willis argued that: the 'working-class youths creatively developed,

transformed and reproduced aspects of the larger culture in their own practice in such a way as to finally direct them to certain kinds of work' (p. 2). However, Willis noted that apart from processes in the school, the home, family, neighbourhood, media and non-productive working-class experience were equally vital for the continuous reproduction of subordination (p. 106).

Anyon (1981) focused on resistance in elementary rather than secondary schools. Her work emphasised class inequality emanating from a different source than that identified by the three previous writers, namely the control of knowledge. Anyon conducted a qualitative case study of five US elementary schools which were located in contrasting social class settings within two school districts (p. 3). The sample included two working-class schools, one middle class school, one affluent professional school and an executive elite school. Her study revealed that 'although some amount of resistance appeared in all schools, it was especially dominant in the working-class schools (p. 11). In particular, students' resistance was engendered by the existence of a social stratification in knowledge among the schools based on what was considered 'appropriate knowledge for the students'. Anyon argued that: 'while there were similarities in curriculum topics and materials, there were also subtle as well as dramatic differences in the curriculum and the curriculum-in-use among the schools' (p. 3). Thus, Anyon contended that the differences between teachers' and students' perceptions of school knowledge were expressed in terms of students' resistance (p. 6). This resistance was characteristic of teacher-student relations, and students in the working-class schools both actively and passively resisted teachers' attempts to impose the curriculum. According to Anyon, active resistance took the form of 'rudely interrupting teachers, falling out of chairs and misplacing their books, while passive forms included withholding their enthusiasm or attention and not responding to teachers' question' (p. 6). Anyon

was also of the view that school knowledge in the working-class schools had a reproductive function which directly contributed to the legitimation and perpetuation of students' own class position in society (p. 32). For instance, working-class students were not taught about their own working-class history, and emphasis was placed on 'mechanical behaviours as opposed to sustained conception' (ibid). In this regard, the students were taught skills essential for the acquisition of manual jobs while they were denied the knowledge and skills necessary for furthering their class position or for social transformation.

Marxist resistance theories have been criticised for their failure to explore other possible explanations for oppositional behaviour in school besides resistance to capitalist society (Abowitz, 2000; Blackledge and Hunt, 1985). For example, they do not consider the possibility that a wide range of factors other than structural inequalities, such as peer relations and material deprivation, may contribute to students' actions at school. Likewise, Marxist resistance theorists have been criticised for their failure to explore more subtle distinctions between different types of student activities (Blackledge and Hunt, 1985; Hargreaves, 1982). They see resistance as a main student response to the inequalities that they experienced at school. However, it has been shown that there are a variety of students' responses to school. Furthermore, it is possible that students who resist school may not always do so all the time but may actually conform under other circumstances (Blackledge and Hunt, 1985; Hammersley and Turner, 1984). In this regard, resistance theories have ignored the diverse and complex ways in which students respond to school (Hammersley and Turner, 1984; Hargreaves, 1982:112-113).

Marxist resistance theorists described above have examined student resistance in terms of class-based explanations and have demonstrated how one

particular cultural group have resisted the process of schooling. However, other researchers have advanced other explanations for students' resistance⁸. These researchers have shown how marginalised youths from different gendered and racial groups draw on diverse cultural resources in the pursuit of deviant acts (Furlong, 1985:178). Student disengagement generated by gender or ethnic discrimination are illustrated in the empirical studies of Fuller (1980), Mac an Ghaill (1988); Gillborn (1990) and more recently Shain (2003) which I will briefly examine below.

Fuller (1980) conducted her research on black British girls of West Indian parentage in a London comprehensive school. She was of the view that the girls' deviance was a form of resistance to their experience of discrimination on grounds of both gender and race; as she put it: 'the girls were aware of their double subordination as women and blacks' (p. 64). Thus, Fuller argued that 'the girls' forms of action and the import of their stance within school can be understood as strategies for trying to effect some control over their present and future lives' (p. 57). The girls, who were in the top ability group at school, were pro-education as they were strongly committed to academic achievement. Yet, they were critical of particular school practices and were perceived by teachers as being anti-school. The girls demonstrated their resistance by developing a subcultural response to schooling (p. 53) which had peculiar characteristics. This response differed from those subcultural responses highlighted by researchers such as Hargreaves and Willis, in that this subculture was not formed by low ability students who had low academic aspirations and a negative orientation to school. Rather, the girls' subculture emerged from their positive acceptance of the fact of being both black

⁸ The current literature on student resistance spans various disciplines including cultural anthropology (Mc Dermott and Hood, 1982; Roberts, 1976; Spindler, 1982, Fordham and Ogbu, 1985) and sociological theoretical perspectives such as Feminism, Neo Gramscianism, Post Modernism and Post Structuralism.

and female (p. 57). Therefore, although the girls conformed to the stereotype of 'good' pupils in some respects, such as completing school tasks and home work (p. 59), they gave all appearances in class of not listening or working (p. 60). Furthermore, the girls engaged in behaviours that brought them into serious conflict with teachers such as truanting, directly challenging teachers' authority, grossly disruptive behaviour within the classroom and illegitimate activities (reading magazine, chatting and doing homework for another subject) (p. 59-60)⁹.

Like Fuller, Shain (2003) examined the plight of female students most of whom were in high academic sets. However, her research differed in terms of the ethnic group studied as well as in the resistance strategies employed by each ethnic group. In *Schooling and Identity of Asian Girls*, Shain examined 44 working-class Asian girls aged 13-16 years who she claimed were actively involved in the production of identities that drew on home, local and regional cultures (p. ix). More specifically, she focused on how the wider discourses of gender, race, class and age shaped students' experiences of schooling and society, and the strategies that they used to deal with these experiences. Thus, Shain argued that the Asian girls actively engaged in strategies of resistance to deal with their everyday experiences in school (p. 57). She identified specific strategies of resistance that were manifested by four groups of girls:

- a) *The Gang Girls* employed the strategy of 'us and them'. In a similar way to Willis' lads, these girls, who were in low ability sets, developed a counter-school subculture defined in terms of opposition to racism rather than class inequalities (p. 59).
- b) *The Survivors*, who were in high academic sets, employed a strategy of 'apparent passivity' where they downplayed the effects racism or sexism. Hence, though they were aware of the existence of racism and sexism and

⁹ See Mirza 1992: 21-25 for an assessment of Fuller's work.

experienced both, they ignored the manifestations of these issues rather than overtly expressing any opposition (p. 77). In this regard, they conformed to the stereotype of the 'quiet and shy Asian girl'.

- c) *The Rebels*, who were in mid to high academic sets, developed a strategy of cultural rebellion. This group of girls experienced uneven gender relations in their family and community which influenced their approach to schooling. Thus, their resistance was seen in their cultural practices including their preference for Western clothing, their association with non-Asian friends as well as their compliance with Western notions of femininity.
- d) *The Faith Girls* prioritised the operation of racism in school and opposed attacks on their religious practices (p. 128). They drew on a combination of resistance through culture and survival strategies to cope with their experiences at school (p. 111).

Both Mac an Ghail (1988) and Gillborn (1990) focused predominantly on boys' resistance to their experiences of racism. Mac an Ghail argued that certain practices by the school, such as the differentiation of students into different streams or sets based on their behaviour rather than their cognitive ability, served to disadvantage Afro-Caribbean males. Thus, these students were seen to have low ability and potential discipline problems (p. 64). Mac an Ghail maintained that these male students consequently received a disproportionate amount of censure and control compared with other ethnic groups. Furthermore, white teachers displayed a negative view of these students as being disadvantaged by virtue of their home culture or family structure. This behaviour on the part of teachers resulted in a deterioration in teacher-student relations. Hence, the boys resisted their differential treatment in school by turning to a distinctive subculture. For example, Mac an Ghail argued that a visible form of resistance by those he called the Rasta Heads was the establishment of an anti-school subculture. This response was contrasted with that of the Black Sisters. They manifested an invisible form of resistance which was described as 'a strategy of resistance within accommodation' (p. 11). Thus, the

girls rejected what they saw as the racist curriculum while highly valuing academic qualifications.

In his study of City Road Comprehensive, a multi-ethnic school in the Midlands, Gillborn observed similar behaviour by teachers. He argued that the teachers' ethnocentric perception led to actions which were racist in their consequences (p. 35). Thus, the Afro-Caribbean students found themselves in a disadvantageous position at school (p. 45) where they experienced conflicting relationships with teachers. Although Afro-Caribbean students had various ways of responding, the extreme adaptations were similar to those proposed by Mac an Ghaill. At one end of the spectrum, the boys developed a subculture where they glorified their members' ethnicity and physical prowess (p. 53) while at the other they accommodated to their situation by countering the experience of criticism and control and promoting an image of academic success (p. 61).

A significant development within the sociology of education in the later part of the twentieth century was the response by Feminists to the neo-Marxist work in education. Their criticism was that the neo-Marxist work in education had neglected other social factors such as gender and race' and had also failed to examine 'the role of process, interaction and discourse in the production and reproduction of education, knowledge and power' (Aitchison, 2003:95). This reaction gave rise to an established body of feminist work which pointed to the 'complex nature of gender relations within the education system and various related processes and practices' (Aitchison, 2003:93). This development was seen in the work of Sandra Acker, Madeleine Arnot, Miriam David, Lynn Davies, Rosemary Deem and Gaby Weiner among others and in the publication of collections of papers such as Deem (1978) and Walker and Barton (1983).

2.3.4 Symbolic Interactionist Studies of Student Disengagement

The fourth and final sociological approach I will examine was influenced by symbolic interactionism. This was developed by Herbert Blumer and others on the basis of the social psychological theories of Mead, Cooley and others, and the kind of sociology that developed in the so-called Chicago School, from the 1920s through to the 1950s (see Hammersley, 1989a:2; Rock, 1979:chapter one). Blumer (1969:2) identified three basic premises of interactionism:

- a) Humans act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
- b) The meanings of such things are derived from or arise out of social interaction among people.
- c) These meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things he encounters.

In the context of the sociology of education in the 1970s interactionism implied:

- (a) an emphasis on the diversity and contextual variability of actors' interpretations of situations, and how these shape courses of action in a contingent manner, thereby introducing complexity and uncertainty into social processes (Blumer, 1969); and
- (b) an insistence that school values and rules, and also definitions of knowledge and learning, should not simply be treated as given, but instead must be analysed as socio-historical constructions.

The symbolic interactionist perspective has developed since the twentieth century and has transformed in terms of the issues that are explored as well as in its theoretical orientation (see Fine, 1993; Rock, 1979: 24-25).

Symbolic Interactionist studies on disengagement have generally adopted an appreciative stance (Matza, 1969: 25) by presenting an in-depth description and understanding of the deviants' view with the aim of interpreting the world and process as it appears to them. Equally significant, is an emphasis on the importance of recognising process and change, rather than stability and structure, and diversity more than universality. Some appreciative studies of school deviance have focused on how students made sense of their classroom situation and the deviant behaviours they displayed in various contexts based on their varied interpretations. Key studies in this respect include Werthman (1963, 1984); Furlong (1976); Gannaway (1976); Rosser, Marsh and Harré (1978) and Tattum (1982). Other studies have focused on classroom interaction between students and teachers that lead to engagement in deviant activities, and have highlighted the range of strategies that students adopt based on their focal interests. Studies in this research strand are exemplified by the work of Pollard (1980, 1982, 1984) and Turner (1983).

Studies which emphasise students' interpretations suggest that students display deviant behaviour when teachers do not live up to their expectations. Students' interpretation of teachers' behaviour was examined in terms of the use of assessment criteria for appropriate teacher behaviour or the interactional/behavioural rules governing social situations. The studies by Werthman, Gannaway and Furlong all highlighted the manifestation of deviance based on student assessment of teacher behaviour. Werthman (1984) studied a black lower-class gang inside and outside an American school. The gang's deviance was based on their assessment of the fairness of teachers' actions, that is, whether the treatment received from teachers was considered legitimate and acceptable. Werthman's gang judged teachers on four criteria:

- a) What were the proper jurisdictional claims made by teachers? Punishment for misbehaviour should not be automatic but should depend on the suitable exercise of authority.
- b) What was the limit to teachers' legitimate authority? Issues relating to race, dress, hairstyles and mental ability should be out of teachers' jurisdiction.
- c) How was teachers' authority exercised? Preference was given to pleasant requests over insulting and demeaning demands.
- d) What was the basis on which teachers assign grades? There was an expectation of fair grading rather than grades being randomly distributed, given as a bribe, or as a sanction.

Gannaway did not focus specifically on the behaviour of gang members in school but on students more generally, this time in a secondary school in the UK. These students evaluated their teachers in terms of a model of how the 'ideal teacher' ought to behave. The evaluative criteria used by Gannaway's students included:

- a) The ability to keep order: whether or not the teacher can keep order, for example, not allowing rudeness, controlling noise in the classroom, preventing unauthorised movement.
- b) The teacher's philosophy and teaching strategies: whether the teacher was boring or taught boring things.
- c) The nature of the subject that was taught: whether the subject itself was interesting.
- d) The personal characteristics of the teacher: whether the teacher was one who understood the students.
- e) The utility of the subject: whether the class activities were useful in terms of students' enjoyment of preferred tasks or of the relevance of the task for future work prospects.

In much the same way, Furlong's (1976) study of deviance in a secondary modern school demonstrated that students' deviant responses were based on their definition of the classroom situation. He used the example of Carol and those she interacted with to explain the nature of their deviance, arguing that, for them, the most significant factor was often the teachers' behaviour. Thus, many of Carol's assessment criteria were related to the way teachers taught and the methods they used for controlling the class (p. 34). Carol assessed her teachers in two main ways namely, strict vs. soft and effective vs. ineffective. Teachers who did not live up to her particular criteria of assessment (i.e. 'those who can't teach you nothing') were 'written off', and even before the lesson began they were considered non-starters (p. 36).

In all three studies, the students modified their behaviour and conformed to classroom expectations when teachers met their criteria. As Werthman put it:

Yet when gang members are convinced that...ground rules are being legitimately pursued, that a teacher is really interested in teaching them something and that efforts to learn will be rewarded, they consistently show up on time, leave when the class is dismissed, raise their hands before speaking, and stay awake. (Werthman, 1984:223)

This suggests that individuals simultaneously drew on all criteria in assessing teachers' behaviour. Moreover, this proclivity to use the evaluative criteria in combination is aptly illustrated in the case of Gannaway's (1976) students. Although these students wanted a strict teacher, they also wanted someone 'who will laugh with you, won't let you get too stropky, stops the lesson getting boring, don't let the class do what they want (p. 51). Thus, to them 'the ideal teacher represented a fine balance between freedom and control' (p. 53).

In Werthman's and Gannaway's research it was assumed that students' assessment and deviant behaviours were consistent within the relevant group and across contexts. However, Furlong does not adopt such a position; indeed he sought to highlight the variability of pupils' assessment and patterns of behaviour. He was of the view that teachers, subjects and teaching methods meant different things to different students (p. 42). Thus, he argued that since classroom situations vary in the meaning they have for them, students may change their assessments of how to behave across contexts (p. 26). Furthermore, he maintained that students engaged in shifting patterns of interaction based on their varying assessments of their teachers. He therefore documented five emerging patterns of situated interaction with resultant student behaviours:

- a) Successful (effective) lessons: here Carol and her friends judged that they were able to 'learn a lot' and it was irrelevant whether the teacher was 'strict or soft' (p. 36).
- b) Judgement of teachers in terms of effectiveness: teachers considered to be 'potentially effective' were judged on the content of the lesson. Those teachers who were able to provide the right learning context (i.e. were effective) were treated differently from those who were perceived to be ineffective. For strict effective teachers the lesson content was irrelevant as 'you just have to work'. With soft effective teachers the specific lesson content was very important (p. 38).
- c) Non-learning situations: lessons were perceived to be non-learning situations in two main ways – when potentially effective teachers did not provide an adequate learning context and when teachers were considered ineffective (here, the lesson content was irrelevant).
- d) Bunking it: when it was not possible to learn students absconded from lessons by running out of the classroom or not bothering to turn up in the first place (p. 39).
- e) Teachers who became strict: When soft teachers (whether effective or not) tried to become strict students became defiant.

Furlong (1976) captured the variability in behaviour through his concept of 'interaction set'. He described an 'interaction set' as 'a group of individuals who perceive what is happening in the same way, communicate this to each other and agree on what are the appropriate ways to behave in the situation' (p. 27). Furlong argued that, although students within an interaction set may not all behave in the same way, their actions symbolically indicate that they share common definitions of the situation and that they support the actions of each other (e.g. by watching and laughing). Moreover, he maintained that since students did not always agree on how they judge a situation, they moved in and out of interaction sets depending on whether they had similar definitions of the classroom situation (p. 29).

Other studies by Marsh et al. (1978) and Tattum (1982) also emphasised the manifestation of deviance based on students' assessment of the rules governing teacher behaviour in social situations. While Marsh et al. conducted their study with students from two comprehensive schools who were selected as typically disruptive, Tattum carried out a study of 29 disruptive students who had been removed from mainstream schooling and educated in a special on-site unit. In both cases, student disengagement was perceived as a reaction to or a revenge for teachers' offences. These offences occurred where teachers defied the rules governing their behaviour or where they deviated from the expected behaviour in particular classroom situations. Consequently, the students justified their disruptive behaviour by making reference to certain 'rules of interpretation' which identified teacher offences committed. According to Marsh et al. (1978:36-40) the specific offences identified by students included:

- a) Teachers who were 'a load of rubbish': they did not take a personal interest in or care for students; did not treat students seriously; did not take

students' ideas seriously; treated students like young children; were strict and focused exclusively on school work.

- b) Anonymity: not knowing students' names.
- c) The soft teacher: showing weakness where strength is expected. This was seen to be the worst category of offence.
- d) Sibling comparison: treating students in a way which suggested that they were similar in behaviour to an older sibling.
- e) Being 'put down' or 'picked on' through the helplessness of their position as students or children.
- f) Unjust punishment: where penalties imposed were unrelated to the offence.

Thus, Marsh et al. argued that students do not passively accept teachers' offences but rather 'any action by the teacher which is deemed an offence is retaliated against without question' (1978: 34, 43). Moreover, students' deviant behaviours were governed by certain 'principles of retribution' and the form that the retribution took depended on whether the offence committed was perceived to be demeaning or non-demeaning (1978: 44). These rules fell into two broad categories namely, a) principles of reciprocity (reciprocal actions): where the action took the same form as the insult (contempt for contempt) or where the value of the offence was returned and b) principles of equilibration: where students 'behaved in such a way to restore themselves as mature beings' or where they withdrew into silence (1978:44-45).

Tattum's students appealed to specific techniques of neutralisation as a means of legitimising their misbehaviour. The five justifications employed by his students included:

- a) It was the teacher's fault: teachers' inability to control the class or set inappropriate work; teachers shouting at students or 'showing them up'.

- b) Not being treated with respect: students being treated improperly or with impoliteness.
- c) Inconsistency of rule application: students being treated unfairly, teachers having favourites in the class or using scapegoats.
- d) We were only messing about: students 'having a laugh' or joking about.
- e) It is the fault of the school system: students expressing frustration and hostility at having to come to school.

Hence, where teachers deviated from students' classroom and school expectations, students responded by engaging in deliberately chosen disruptive behaviours.

Unlike the other interactionist studies discussed so far, both Pollard (1980, 1982, 1984) and Turner (1983) analysed student disengagement in terms of students' efforts at establishing their definition of the situation in the classroom through some form of negotiation. Thus, Pollard saw deviance in terms of students' challenges to the working consensus that had been established between teacher and a particular class while Turner analysed it in terms of students' use of negotiative strategies. Pollard (1980) carried out a two-year ethnographic research project at Moorside Middle School located in a working-class area in northern England. He argued that teachers and students have different interests-at-hand which they have to juggle in order to preserve their self-conceptions and self-representations. Some of these interests-at-hand may assume more importance and may become articulated at any given time during an interactive situation (Pollard, 1982:32). For teachers, some of these interests-at-hand include: preserving their self-image, minimising their work load, maintaining health and avoiding stress, enjoying work, protecting their professional autonomy, maintaining order and providing instruction (Pollard, 1980: 42; 1982:32). The students' interests-at-hand are: maintaining their self-image, enjoying interaction with others,

controlling stress, retaining their dignity, having a secure peer group membership and learning (Pollard, 1984: 248). Pollard was of the view that teachers and students have to balance their overall self-interest in order to achieve a general level of self-satisfaction (1982:35). Hence, both parties have to accomplish their daily classroom lives as well as cope with the requirements of each other. This is made possible by accommodating each other through negotiated understandings which form the working consensus. According to Pollard:

.... the working consensus should be seen as a mutual accommodation, and in this sense it represents a 'truce' rather than a consensus – an acceptance by both parties that the other has the power or resource to threaten their own ability to 'cope' and 'survive' (Woods, 1977) in the classroom situation. (Pollard, 1984:247)

Consequently, both teachers and students adopt specific tactics which may coalesce over time and become coping strategies. Moreover, Pollard (1982) argued that when both parties act, they will each adapt their strategies to cope with the specific situations that they find themselves in.

Pollard (1984:238) maintained that the greatest possible threat to students' coping in the classroom was teachers' authority, and students adjusted their actions with regard to this power. Teachers can be perceived by students to be unreasonable in their censures and students can be seen by teachers to engage in unacceptable disorder (Furlong, 1985:121). As such, both teachers and students regard each other's behaviour as a potential challenge to the working consensus, and the power of both parties lies in their ability to mobilise support. For students, this is seen in the way different friendship groups react to teachers' authority and the degree to which they support teachers when they reprimand the class (1984:238). In this regard, Pollard (1984) categorised the 75 students he studied

into three broad groups based on their reaction to the teacher's authority. He argued that:

The type of groups represent... different types of solution to the problems posed by school life...Some will seek to cope with it by conforming and seeking to 'please the teacher' as much as possible; some will reject the whole experience, treat it as an attack on their self esteem and resist it; some may try to negotiate their way through the situation by balancing their concerns with those of the teacher. Thus we have the strategies of the 'good' groups, the 'gang' groups and the 'joker' groups.

(Pollard, 1984:253)

As such, the three groups coped differently with their classroom life, either acting within or outside of the bounds of the working consensus. Whereas the goodies (being conformists) and the jokers (being routine deviants) acted within the bounds of the working consensus, in some situations the gangs (being oppositional) acted outside the bounds of the working consensus with their actions being derived from their peer group culture (1984: 247).

Turner (1983) carried out his study at Stone Grove Comprehensive School, a secondary school located in a small industrial town in the South Midlands, UK. In a similar way to Pollard, he considered students' responses to teachers' demands during various segments of lessons which led to manifestations of deviant or conformist actions (p. 54). Turner argued that the responses available to any student included: compliance (doing as told without hesitation or question); distanced compliance (complying with the demand in such a way that at the same time distance was expressed from the act of conforming); disguised deviance (attempts made to cover up the deviance e.g. by pretending to work); withdrawal (withdrawing from a task that they found too difficult or boring); sabotage

(attempting to wreck a lesson and undermine the authority of the teacher); and refusal (directly or indirectly failing to respond to teachers' demands).

Turner argued that students' responses to teachers' demands depended on their success in establishing their definitions of the situation through negotiations with their teachers. Thus, whilst most teacher demands were presented as non-negotiable, in practice both teachers and students used a variety of negotiative techniques to establish their definitions (p. 80). The forms of negotiation open to both teachers and students included: persistence (used by both parties: teacher persists in original demand or students persist in deviant response); threats (used mostly by teachers); promises (used by both teachers and students); rhetorical statements (used mostly by teachers) and mobilisation of support (used by both teachers and students). According to Turner, the most important strategy used by both teachers and students was mobilisation of support. For students, this involved someone taking the initiative to present an alternative deviant course of action in response to the teacher's demand and then trying to persuade others to support their actions. (p. 76). However, Turner argued that mobilising support required much skill to be successful as at the same time teachers are trying to counteract students' deviant initiatives before they have a chance to become established (p. 76). Individual students who were successful in establishing their deviant definitions were able to mobilise support for their actions from small groups in the class. Accordingly, the frequent occurrence of these group collaborations led to the development of established ways of behaving or subcultures (p. 42).

Turner made an added contribution to the study of student disengagement by presenting an integrated approach to the analysis of deviance. He therefore sought to demonstrate how students' deviant responses were related to their

general orientations. Turner argued that students' orientations were determined by their own personal goals as well as by their attitude to the school's goals. Moreover, he contended that the decisions that students made in lessons were influenced by their goals and interests, and the course of action they adopted had long-term consequences for the attainment of their goals. However, students' level of commitment to their goals was also an important consideration (p. 90) as students sometimes compromised their goals in order to take advantage of opportunities for deviance. In addition, Turner highlighted the significance of peers in influencing students' decision making in the classroom and, for particular students, their disengagement. He argued that this mostly occurred through the informal school culture. As such, students' informal status was measured mainly in non-academic terms through a strong norm restricting school work. To avoid the label of 'creep' or 'swot' students made use of identity management strategies much like those adopted by Measor and Woods' knifedgers namely, concealing the amount of school work done and displaying deviant behaviours so as to appear to be 'one of the lads' (p. 144). In this regard, Turner's model assumed that a minimum amount of peer relations or peer pressure was necessary either to encourage the mobilisation of support or to make certain deviant activities attractive.

These kinds of symbolic interactionist work have been subjected to some criticisms. Perhaps the main one is that symbolic interactionists fail to provide a macro theory¹⁰ that explains why particular students adopt different types of adaptations and strategies (see Furlong, 1985: 123- 124). While this is certainly a criticism that needs to be taken into account, the great advantage of symbolic interactionism is precisely that it addresses the complexity of students' behaviour. Symbolic interactionism has also been criticised for its inability to deal with issues

¹⁰ See Hammersley (1980) 'On interactionist Empiricism' for a detailed discussion of this criticism of symbolic interactionism.

such as conflict, power and social inequality. However, although these issues have not been the main focus of the perspective, the emphasis on the social world of everyday experiences of students can reveal a range of structural or social factors that contribute to students' actions (see Martin and Dennis, 2010: 9-10). Thus, it is possible to explore the impact of wider institutional or home factors on students' disengagement and to relate students' perspectives to their orientations, the structure of the school, and indeed to the culture or society in which they live (see Hammersley, 1980).

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the conceptual disagreements surrounding 'disengagement' and related terms among psychologists. I also examined how among sociologists disengagement in schools has been dealt with under the broad headings of 'deviance' and 'resistance', with a variety of approaches being adopted concerned with subcultures, adaptations, and processes of social interaction in the classroom. However, in an effort to explore the nature of students' disengagement there is a need to clarify how the term will be used in this study. Therefore, I will consider a re-conceptualisation of the notion of disengagement and associated terms in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: RECONCEPTUALISING STUDENT DISENGAGEMENT

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter it was seen that while the concept of disengagement was used in the psychological literature, there was considerable disagreement about the meaning of the term. Meanwhile, in sociology other terms tended to be used such as 'deviance' and 'resistance'. It is also striking that whereas sociologists have not paid much attention to definitional issues, psychologists have been preoccupied with these. Moreover, they have tended to search for clear-cut operational definitions, tying terms like 'disengagement' to specific behavioural features. There is an important issue here about the nature of the concepts employed in research. A central theme in the development of symbolic interactionism was opposition to what Blumer called 'definitive concepts'. He argued that given the dynamic and complex nature of social phenomena it is better to think of concepts as 'sensitising'. He outlined the contrast as follows:

'A definitive concept refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed bench marks. This definition or the bench marks, serve as a means of clearly identifying the individual instance of the class and the make-up of that instance that is covered by the concept. A sensitizing concept lacks such specification of attributes or bench marks and consequently it does not enable the user to move directly to the instance and its relevant content. Instead, it gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide

prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look' (Blumer, 1954: 7)

Despite arguable limitations of Blumer's reasoning¹¹, sensitising concepts allow for the discovery of the relevant features of social phenomena through the examination of instances of it. Therefore, in analysing my research data, the notion of disengagement will be recast as a sensitising rather than a definitive concept.

In an attempt to clarify this concept, I propose a re-conceptualisation of students' disengagement in terms of the extent to which their attention and activity are focused on the official agenda of the lesson. My specific concern here is on classroom disengagement as part of a broader process of disengagement from schooling. In this task, I will use Goffman's work on 'focused gatherings'. Goffman was, of course, a student of Blumer and a central figure in the interactionist tradition.

Goffman discussed the notions of engagement and disengagement in several of his books, notably 'Encounters' (1961) and 'Behaviour in Public Places' (1963). In 'Encounters', (1961) he focused on the study of interaction among a small number of persons, who are in each other's immediate presence engaging in face-to-face social interaction. However, in 'Behaviour in Public Places', he extended his argument to include the regulation of social order in larger gatherings in public social settings, such as parks, as well as in semi-private social establishments including classrooms and offices. Thus, Goffman sought to describe the particular rules involved in social interaction situations and how they are enacted. This work was part of Goffman's (1983) broader concern with 'the

¹¹ For example Hammersley (1989b) contended that there are gaps and unresolved problems in Blumer's assessment of the relationship between concepts and data.

interaction order', which he outlined in his 1982 presidential address to the American Sociological Association:

Goffman analysed face-to-face interaction within the framework of the notion of a 'gathering' as the basic social interactional unit. He distinguished between two basic types of gathering, based on the nature of the social interaction (focused or unfocused) that individuals engaged in. A '*focused gathering*' (also referred to as 'face engagement' or 'encounter') occurs 'when two or more participants¹² openly join and mutually cooperate with each other in sustaining for a time a single focus of cognitive and visual attention' (Goffman, 1961: 7). The term '*unfocused gathering*' is used by Goffman to refer to 'those interpersonal communications that result solely by virtue of persons being in one another's immediate physical presence' (1961: 7) and where the participants pursue separate lines of concern, for example, strangers in a waiting room or pedestrians on a street who are in close proximity to one another but do not communicate directly (Kendon, 1983: 24).

Goffman (1963) examined the organisation of gatherings within the context of 'social situations'. A 'social situation' refers to any full spatial environment within which an individual who enters automatically becomes a member of a focused or unfocused gathering (1963:18). Examples of social situations would include parks, offices or schools. He was of the view that when people come into each other's immediate presence they tend to do so as participants of a 'social occasion'. This was defined as the 'wider social affair, undertaking or event bound in regard to place and time' (1963:18), which provides a structured social context for the formation of gatherings, for example a picnic, a party, a work day at an office or a

¹² Goffman called the official members of the focused gathering 'participants', while unengaged individuals are referred to as 'bystanders'.

school day. The specific events that occur within the social situation in keeping with a social occasion are known as 'situated activities' (1963:89-90). These specified events can take the form of an interpersonal communicative act or a jointly sustained non-verbal physical task known as a 'situated activity system' (1961: 8). Goffman (1963) noted that in many social situations there is a single focused situated activity which is the main involvement, since it is an intrinsic and obligatory part of the social occasion, in some sense representing the participants' purpose in being present (p. 51). Additionally, he distinguished between social occasions that are formal, with a 'tight' devotion to the occasion, and those that are informal, with 'loose' devotion to the occasion. Thus, in terms of Goffman's framework, schools are perceived to stage formal social occasions, from assemblies to lessons, to which students are expected to remain thoroughly oriented during school hours (1963: 200)¹³. Moreover, these social occasions have fairly well-defined beginnings and ends, fairly strict limits on attendance and tolerated activities and include many situational obligations or constraints.

Within any given social situation, those persons engaged in a social occasion may form a focused or unfocused gathering. Where all the participants in a social situation are officially part of the face-to-face interaction, a fully focused gathering is formed (1963:91). This can be exemplified by the social setting of a classroom where all the participants (both teacher and students) are obliged to sustain a main involvement in the same kind of activity and not be engaged in other activities (1963:168). When other persons who are officially present in the situation are not part of the encounter they are seen to be 'unengaged' or 'disengaged' and

¹³ In schools a variety of gatherings take place, both sequentially and simultaneously: lessons, assemblies, staff meetings, students' activities in the playground, teachers' activities in staffrooms, interviews in the head's office, etc. These are all different social situated activities that occur in keeping with the social occasion within the school environment.

this changes the gathering into a partly focused one (1963:91,155). It is also possible that those present in the same situation (for example in a park) may each engage in one of many encounters occurring simultaneously, giving rise to a multi-focused gathering (1963:91).

3.2 Crucial Attributes of Focused Gatherings

An essential requirement of a focused gathering is that the participants maintain a continuous engrossment in the official focus of activity (1961:10). Such involvement occurs spontaneously when there is an effortless disassociation from all other events or an honest unawareness of matters other than the activity (1961:35). Participants are expected to suppress or conceal many of the capacities and roles that might be expected to be displayed in other settings (1963:25), and visibly show that they are still engaged in the main focus of attention (1963:60). Thus, there is a kind of respect and regard for the main involvement and for the focused gathering (1963:196). Where it is not possible for those in a focused interaction to maintain such selective attention, they will actively turn away from or suppress other external issues. (1961:24). As Goffman puts it 'whatever his other concerns... the individual is obliged to "come into play" upon entering the situation and to stay "in play" while in the situation (1963:25). A 'we-rationale' develops, defined as 'a sense of the single thing that we the participants are avowedly doing together at the time' (1963: 98). Moreover, this helps to establish the order of the interaction in terms of what should be attended to (1963:19)¹⁴. To this end, 'there

¹⁴ The assumption is that this commitment to the focused gathering should obtain whether the individuals in the gathering have chosen to participate or whether they are obliged to participate in it by wider social requirements.

are agreements concerning perceptual relevancies and irrelevancies, as well as a "working consensus" involving a degree of mutual considerateness, sympathy and a muting of opinion differences' (1963:96). In this way a shared definition of the situation comes to prevail (1963: 96). Hence, loyalty to the encounter is essential as participants are obliged to stay within their 'engagement' (p. 179).

However, Goffman contended that while participants may generally express a shared loyalty to the focused gathering and may share equally in the rights and obligations, this is not always the case. In certain focused gatherings (especially in formal settings) there are some rights that may be differentially distributed or narrowly restricted (1963: 100). For instance, during the course of a social occasion, one or more participants may be seen as responsible for getting the affair under way, guiding the main activity, terminating the event, and sustaining order during the social occasion's main activity (1963:18). Thus, the focused gathering is initiated by someone making an opening move and the other participants must be ready to respond to the request for face engagement (1963:104), turning their minds to the same subject matter and (in the case of conversation) to the same speaker (1963: 95-96). Taking the example of a classroom, the rights to be the main speaker or teach the lesson during its various phases would rest mainly with the teacher, and students are obliged to respond to the teacher's request for attention to conduct the lesson.

Goffman (1963) argued that social interactions in public places have an order to them. Within focused gatherings, this order is generally upheld through adherence to a special set of rules called 'situational proprieties' (1963: 243). Moreover, in public settings such as social establishments these rules about the main involvement are formally imposed (1963:56). At the same time, the problem of

maintaining order will be largely internal to the encounter (1963:154), and a particular member may serve as custodian of situational order, being obliged to see that all individuals who are present maintain a suitable level of involvement in the main activity (1963:104). Thus, in the classroom, it is the teachers' duty to try to ensure that there are no forms of impermissible involvement that challenge the official order (1963: 227).

3.3 Situational Improprieties

Goffman drew attention to the problems faced by the participants in a focused interaction. Uneasiness or tensions can occur when the participants find themselves drawn to matters officially excluded from the focused gathering or are at odds with the official focus of attention (1961:39). He maintained that participants are in a position to show attachment to or alienation from the gathering in which they find themselves (1963:246). When alienated, participants are no longer able or willing to feign conformity to the encounter and they find themselves 'flooding out' of it (1961: 50). Furthermore, where the individual becomes alienated or wants to appear alienated from an on-going engagement 'situational improprieties' occur (1963:231). Thus, individuals within the focused gathering can conduct themselves in a way which is considered to be improper in the situation and are seen to be committing an offensive act against the focused gathering (1963: 217). Goffman identified various situational improprieties performed by the disengaged or unengaged participant:

- a) There is a rule against 'having no purpose' or being disengaged. However, the participant may find it impossible to sustain an appearance of

involvement in the official activity and, in order to mask disengagement, the participant in the focused gathering who is still physically present may engage in other activities which may be seen to be visibly acceptable within the situation (p. 58). Individuals can also betray the encounter by taking leave in an abrupt way. In this case the individual has withdrawn from the focused gathering to engage in an alternative activity.

- b) There are limits put on those kinds of emigration of the self which can occur without leaving one's physical position (p. 194). One example is individuals allowing their attention to turn from what they and everyone else considers the real world and giving themselves up for a time to a world in which they alone participate, in a process Goffman calls being 'away' (p 69). He was of the view that the most important kind of departure from all public concrete matters within the situation was where individuals relive some past experiences or rehearse some future ones through daydreaming (p. 70). Hence, individuals demonstrate their absence from the current situation by 'a preoccupied, faraway look in their eyes or by a sleep-like stillness of their limbs'. Another example is where people engage in side involvements (e.g. hitting finger on a table) that can be sustained in an utterly 'unconscious' abstracted manner and which convey that they have become carried far away by the meditative task they are performing (ibid). Other self-emigration may include activities like sleeping and gazing (p. 58).
- c) Participants are obliged to withhold attention from matters occurring outside of the engagement, for example to restrain from looking at another event outside of a window or communicating to a bystander outside of a classroom (p. 179). The individual is also constrained to limit his alternative involvement within the situation (p. 194) and there are regulations against un-occasioned main involvements or overtaking side involvements (p.194). Where the

disengaged participants are unable to leave the physical setting entirely they can display alienation from a gathering by doing something else instead of paying attention to the presenter (p. 226). They may control their facial and bodily expression to conceal either their apathy to the content of the encounter or an improper drift from the spirit of the occasion (p. 176).

- d) However some offences are constantly used as a reflection of some kind on one's relation to other specific individuals who are present in the situation (p. 228). In such cases certain forbidden actions in the establishment may be openly performed as acts of 'interpersonal defiance'. Sometimes such affronts are means of testing the limits, to determine how far the guardian can be pressed; sometimes the offenders may apparently act in this way to see if the guardian will be true to them whatever they do (p. 228).
- e) Individuals can betray their encounter by illegitimately withdrawing from the dominant engagement (p. 168), that is 'flooding out' and entering into collective byplay against it. A byplay occurs where a subset of participants withdraw spontaneous involvement from the more exclusive encounter (1961: 55). Hence, this byplay is a non-inclusive side involvement, which is an encounter that is carried on simultaneously with the main activity but in a way carefully calculated so as not to interfere too openly with the main involvement (p. 181). Alternatively, disengaged participants may 'flood in' to another side involvement. Goffman seems to have reserved this notion of 'flooding in' for a bystander, not approved as official part of the focused group, who is entering a dominant engagement (1961: 57). However, within the classroom situation, all participants are officially part of the focused gathering and there is little opportunity for outsiders to flood in. As such, I use the phrase 'flooding in' in a broader sense to refer to a situation where participants who have once been disengaged from the focused gathering

either re-join the main involvement or enter into a collusive byplay with one or more participants in another mutual side involvement.

Goffman argued that participants are obliged to sustain at least a certain minimal main involvement to avoid the appearance of being utterly disengaged (p. 51). Hence, in Goffman's view the focus would be on disengagement as concrete evidence of alienation from the gathering. As he notes 'the individual is required to give visible evidence that he has not wholly given himself up to this main focus of attention' and thereby become disengaged (p. 60).

3.4 The Application of Goffman's Analysis of the Interaction Order to the Classroom Setting

The attractiveness of Goffman's work, for my purposes here, is that it provides a useful framework for understanding the notions of engagement and disengagement in the classroom. Furthermore, it aptly captures the range and diversity of disengaged behaviours that students can engage in at any particular point in time. In applying Goffman's ideas to the analysis of students' classroom interaction, the classroom can be conceived as a physically bounded social setting in a social establishment, whereby a group of people are engaged in a focused face-to-face interaction or some other situated activity in keeping with a tightly defined social occasion.

Based on Goffman's framework, the teaching-learning context within the classroom, as run by the teacher as guardian, would constitute a main or official focused gathering. Thus, the lesson including its various aspects (situated activities)

from start to the end is centred on this gathering. Social interaction in the classroom is bounded by rules, with the main regulation being that students should show their loyalty to the focused gathering by their spontaneous engagement in the lesson. Along with this goes the assumption that students will suppress other events, activities or external issues that may detract from the lesson. Disengagement as conceptualised by Goffman is seen, then, as student behaviour that indicates disloyalty to the focal activity, from a lack of engrossment through to an internal challenge to its intrinsic order, to a 'flooding out' into another form of activity. Hence, drawing on Goffman's work I reconceptualise student disengagement as 'any deviant act committed by students that leads them to partially or totally withdraw their attention from the main lesson agenda as it is unfolding, whether for a short or for a sustained period of time'. Moreover, deviant acts are those behaviours that do not conform to the role that the student should be playing or that contravene the lesson, classroom or school rules.

3.5 Proposed Framework for Exploring Subtypes of Disengagement

Goffman's analysis has provided us with a means for differentiating between engagement and disengagement. However, as currently developed, it does not allow us to adequately capture the distinctions between various forms of disengagement. Although there may be various ways of categorising practical instances of disengagement, in this study I will focus on distinguishing between two subtypes of disengagement, namely disruptive and quiet disengagement. My emphasis on these two forms is derived from an analysis of classroom behaviours that have been of concern to researchers and educators alike. In this regard, I have

adopted a specific re-conceptualisation of these two behaviours which will be outlined below.

3.6 Disruptive Behaviour

Disruptive behaviour has variably been described as disorderly behaviour, misbehaviour, bad behaviour, deviant behaviour, maladaptive behaviour and delinquency (Hollin, 1993:66) and includes heterogeneous behaviours ranging from minor incidences of misconduct or indiscipline (e.g. disobedience and getting into trouble) to more significant misdemeanours or offensive acts (e.g. damaging school property and violence) (Eamon and Altshuler, 2004:23). From a Goffmanian perspective, these behaviours are perceived as manifestations of disengagement since they contravene various institutional rules. Disruption can, in turn, be categorised as trivial or more serious, low level or higher level (Kyriacou, 1997, 1998). Increasing attention has been paid to common forms of disruption in school seen in terms of relatively trivial but chronic and persistent forms of misbehaviour (Elton Report, 1989:67; Kyriacou, 1997:121, 1998:7; Ravet, 2007:234). Manifestations of these forms of disengagement include chatting, talking out of turn, playing; being noisy; daydreaming; excessive non-work-related talk; work avoidance, eating, fidgeting and wandering around among others. What distinguishes these and other types of disruptive behaviours from non-disruptive behaviours is the effect on classroom processes. Disruptive behaviours disrupt, or have the potential to disrupt, these processes, and thereby deflect attention from learning (Ravet, 2007:234); interfere with the teaching process; upset the normal running of the school (Lowenstein, 1975:10 cited in Tattum, 1982:23); interrupt the classroom or

school activity; annoy the teacher; damage interpersonal relationships (Libbey, 2004:276; Tattum,1982:46) or undermine the teacher's ability to establish and maintain effective learning experiences in the classroom (Kyriacou,1997:121). Recasting disruption in terms of its effect, rather than defining it in terms of extent of occurrence, we can define it as any deviant behaviour manifested by students that disrupts the flow of the lesson or has the potential to do so, thereby causing the actor or others to become disengaged, and prompting the teacher to take action. Given this distinction, it can be seen that not all persistent low level misbehaviour would count as disruptive disengagement.

3.7 Quiet Disengagement

Collins (1996, 2000, 2006) has examined the disaffection manifested by quiet pupils. . She defined 'quiet pupils' as those 'withdrawn' individuals who 'are unable to or unwilling to communicate freely with teachers or peers in school' (1996: 19). However, these quiet students could well be talkative in other contexts (such as the home) with people that they knew well (2006:97). Thus, Collins noted that while these quiet students had good attendance records, complied with the classroom rules and did not present a discipline problem, they did not necessarily have a commitment to learning (1996:2)¹⁵. According to Collins, their disaffection at school was seen in their 'habitually quiet, withdrawn non-participatory behaviour' (1996:37). She therefore categorised the withdrawn behaviour of such students into one of four types, namely: a) invisibility (making the self invisible to teachers by sitting position

¹⁵ Collins conducted in-depth case studies of 12 students who were identified as quiet children based on first-hand knowledge of how they behaved in class. The research spanned a period of three years whilst the students were in their penultimate year at an inner city middle school through to their first year in secondary school (Year 6 to Year 8).

or sitting posture so as to have no direct contact with them); b) refusal to participate in the lesson (either by direct refusal or failure to acknowledge the request); c) hesitation (through minimal participation or appearing to be busy but never really engaging with the task) and d) inappropriate focus (appearing to be working on class work but actually engaging in activities that have little or no bearing on the learning task at hand) (1996:37-47). For Collins, disaffection is an attribute inherent in 'quiet' students which predisposes them to engage in specific forms of behaviour. Collins contrasted this quiet disaffected behaviour with that of more boisterous, vocal and outgoing students who had the potential to manifest disruptive behaviour (1996: 56). Collins' account of the disaffection of 'quiet students' places emphasis on their personal attributes, and in view of the revised notion of disengagement (p. 74), not all forms of withdrawal as outlined by her would count as forms of disengagement within Goffman's framework.

It is important to distinguish between the disaffection of 'quiet' pupils, as documented by Collins, and forms of 'quiet' disaffection that may, on occasion, be manifested by a variety of students. From a Goffmanian perspective, the latter of the two behaviours would not be considered as a type of disengagement. The analysis of this second type of disengagement was demonstrated in research conducted by Nardi and Steward (2003). To them quiet disaffection was manifested in a tacit non-disruptive form, which they termed 'disengagement and invisibility' (p. 345). Consequently, they defined 'quiet and invisibly disaffected'¹⁶ students as:

those with low engagement with learning tasks, those who perceive these tasks as lacking in relevance with the world outside school and their own needs, interests and experiences, those who routinely execute but do not get substantially involved with the tasks. These students attend school but often underachieve. (Nardi and Steward 2003:346)

¹⁶ The term 'quiet and invisibly disengaged' was borrowed from Rudduck et al., 1996.

Hence, to them, the form that student disaffection took was 'quiet and invisible' (i.e. not noticeable or easily recognisable) and Nardi and Steward contrasted it with disruptive forms of disaffected behaviours, often expressed in terms of disruption, truancy or absenteeism (2003:345).

Collins' notion of disaffection is suggestive of a psychological quality which gives rise to more or less stable behaviour patterns. However, for Nardi and Steward the notion of quiet disaffection does not imply an inherent attribute. Rather, it conveys a sense of emotional withdrawal resulting from a particular context, for example this could be the nature of the subject taught or the pedagogical practices adopted by a teacher. Of course, the constancy of procedures within a particular context may result in stable behaviour patterns which are displayed by quietly disaffected students. Thus, quiet disaffection as conceptualised by Nardi and Steward would be considered as an engaged act as there is a conscious attempt by the individual to suppress the emotional aspect and to carry out the main class task without withdrawing attention from the lesson. In this case, the students are showing visible evidence that they sustain a minimal involvement in the lesson to avoid the appearance of being utterly disengaged (Goffman 1963: 51).

My conceptualisation of quiet disengagement does not emphasise the identification of students based on perceived personality, but rather on the discovery of concrete behaviours arising out of particular contexts which are subject to variation. In this regard, I use the word 'quiet' here in a metaphorical sense and define quiet disengagement as any deviant behaviour manifested by any student that tend to be mostly invisible and/or involving minimum of noise (or little or no sound). This can be contrasted with loud deviant behaviours characterised by actions that are noisier, verbal and/or that may be conspicuous.

Given the revised definitions of the notions of quiet and disruptive disengagement, I propose the exploration of forms of disengagement through the use of two different frameworks showing dimensions of behaviour along a continuum. In the first framework disengaged behaviours range from quiet forms to louder forms of disengagement. In the second framework disengaged behaviours range from disruptive forms of deviant behaviour to non-disruptive types of misbehaviours.

For the purpose of simplicity, I have grouped patterns of students' disengagement into four categories based on whether it is quiet or loud and whether it takes a disruptive or non-disruptive form. These patterns are presented in Table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1: Forms of students' disengagement along two dimensions

| | Quiet | Loud |
|----------------|--|---|
| Non-disruptive | E.g. -doing puzzles -reading magazines | E.g. -feigning loud burps -yawning loudly to show boredom |
| Disruptive | E.g. -mocking or imitating the teacher -using sign languages to play games or give jokes -hiding students' belongings | E.g. -grabbing or seizing students books while they're working -singing random songs -punching /fighting |

Table 3.1 above shows four possible patterns of students' disengagement along two dimensions. An example of a quiet non-disruptive behaviour would be reading a magazine, while a quiet disruptive behaviour might be imitating the teacher. Furthermore, an example of loud, non-disruptive behaviour might be yawning to indicate boredom or feigning loud burps, while loud, disruptive behaviours would be illustrated by singing random songs or engaging in a fight during the lesson.

Although I have identified four patterns of behaviour, it should be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive and in some cases it is difficult to distinguish the behaviours that fall within each of these four groups. For example, what counts as a disruptive behaviour that betrays or is insulting to the dominant encounter is a subjective interpretation. Accordingly, this would ultimately depend on the teacher's definition of the situation which would vary with the teacher as well as with the teaching context (Kyriacou, 1997:121; Turner, 1983: 53). In this light, the use of the terms 'quiet disengagement'; 'loud disengagement'; 'disruptive disengagement' and 'non-disruptive disengagement' as sensitising concepts is helpful for setting the context for understanding the nature of students' disengagement and offering a framework for exploring variations in this behaviour.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I proposed a re-conceptualisation of the notion of student disengagement in terms of a partial or total withdrawal of attention from the main lesson throughout its various segments and a concurrent engagement in activities that contravene the lesson, classroom or school rules. I also examine subtypes of disengagement along two dimensions namely, quiet - loud disengagement and disruptive - non-disruptive disengagement. In the subsequent analytical chapters, I will use these two dimensions, and will draw on Goffman's work on the interaction order as a lens within which to explore the nature of students' disengagement. However, before I do so, I will explain my research methodology as well as the methods of collecting the data on students' disengagement. These are the topics of the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The methodological approach adopted in this study was an interactionist-based ethnography and in the first section I will begin by discussing this approach and briefly outlining its historical roots. Then, in the next section, I will describe the process of conducting the research. This will focus on two aspects of the research process, namely the work undertaken in the UK that set the stage for the conduct of the research, and the main study conducted in the Caribbean. I end this chapter with a description of the method of data analysis.

SECTION ONE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.2 The Nature of Ethnography

Ethnography has been used in different ways on different occasions and there is debate about what the term 'ethnography' actually means (Hammersley, 2006:3; Walford, 2009:271). Nevertheless, as an approach to social research, it usually involves the researcher participating overtly or covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, observing things as they happen in their natural

setting, talking with them informally and formally, in an effort to explain the issues under consideration (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:3; Woods, 1986:5). The ethnographer is concerned with describing what happens, how the people involve interact with others, as well as how they see and talk about their actions and their world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:7). Thus, the aim of ethnography is to reveal participants' beliefs, values, perspectives and practices, and to explore how these elements develop or change overtime or from situation to situation (Woods 1986:4).

Although participant observation is generally central to ethnographic research, the ethnographer usually engages in data-source triangulation, that is, the collection of large amounts of data of different kinds (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 183). The sources of data include, besides observation, oral accounts such as relatively informal conversations and open-ended interviews complemented by the study of various sorts of written official, publicly available or personal documents (p. 163). However, although ethnography has been mainly associated with qualitative research, ethnographers sometimes employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Taylor, 2006:3) as was the case with the early school-based ethnographies (e.g. Ball, 1981; Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970 and Woods, 1979).

During the conduct of ethnographic research, ethnographers are seen as the chief research instrument (Woods, 1986:8). Thus, rather than relying on a preconceived framework for gathering and analysing data, ethnographers rely fundamentally on their social skills to collect the data and on analytic skills to create a framework for understanding and portraying the nature of the phenomena being studied (Ball, 2003b:32; Walford, 2008:12). Moreover, they employ methods of

analysis that are designed to capture the social complexity of everyday life, for example grounded theorising (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:9). As part of this, they suspend their preconceptions as they endeavour to discover, identify and collect the data and search for meaning (Ball, 2003b: 32). In addition, by assuming a marginal role they seek to conduct the research in a way that grasp insider perspectives, but in an objective way so as to construct an accurate account of the phenomenon under investigation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:9). Thus, ethnographic research includes involvement, immersion and empathy on the one hand and distance, scientific appraisal and objectivity on the other, in order to develop and test explanations (Jeffrey, 2008:141). Above all, ethnographic research is aimed at producing accounts that reflect the participants' experiences and behaviour rather than the values or political commitment of the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:9).

4.3 The Historical Roots of Educational Ethnography

Ethnography, as a form of social research, emerged out of Western anthropological studies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Initially, it was mainly used to provide descriptive accounts of non-Western cultures or communities (Atkinson et al., 2003: 2; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 1). In the nineteenth century, anthropologists largely relied upon reports from missionaries and travellers, rather than generating their own data. However, during the twentieth century, anthropology became concerned with 'first-hand' empirical investigation which was integrated with the theoretical and comparative interpretation of social organisation and culture (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 1). At that time, the main

focus of anthropologists was on relatively small-scale societies outside of the West. Around the middle of the twentieth century they started to apply the same sort of method to communities within the West, and so did sociologists. Since then, ethnography has been employed in other disciplines as well (Atkinson et al., 2003: 7).

The interest in educational ethnography came about in the late twentieth century, starting earlier in the USA in the 1950s and then in the UK during the 1960s and 1970s (Walford, 2008:4). Whereas US ethnographers generally examined school-related issues within the context of students' home communities, UK-based ethnographers focused almost exclusively on processes occurring within schools (Delamont and Atkinson, 1980). As such, the majority of studies in the USA were conducted by cultural anthropologists (such as the pioneer George Spindler and his wife, Louise), which focused on the educational experiences of ethnic and linguistic minorities and rural community settings (Delamont and Atkinson, 1995 cited in Walford, 2008:5; Walford, 2008:19)¹⁷. In the UK, ethnography was very strong in education, with research conducted by sociologists and educationalists (Delamont and Atkinson, 1995 cited in Walford, 2008:5). These researchers sought to understand school processes, with many of them operating within a symbolic interactionist tradition (e.g. Atkinson, 1981; Delamont, 1984; Hammersley, 1974; Woods, 1979; see also Hammersley, 2003: chapter 2). However, as ethnographic approaches sought to highlight the complexities of educational phenomena, educational ethnography transcended its roots in sociology and anthropology (LeCompte, 2002:284). Educational ethnography now also draws inspiration from other fields such as psychology, linguistics, semiotics, political science, literary, cultural and communication studies (ibid).

¹⁷ There was also work in the US by people like Philip Jackson and Louis Smith that might be called ethnographic (or in the first case at least quasi-ethnographic) research.

In the later part of the twentieth century, the term ethnography became re-interpreted and re-contextualised in various ways (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:2). Thus, ethnography increasingly became seen as a multidisciplinary qualitative approach which was being drawn upon by researchers from different theoretical perspective to deal with particular issues (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:2). In this regard, Taylor (2006) has argued that there is much innovation and variety within recent ethnographic research, as seen its use of multiple approaches to data collection, analysis and representation (p. 1). However, this change can be construed to some extent in terms of methodological tensions that have emerged within ethnography. These tensions involve contested issues surrounding the conduct of ethnographic research (Bagley, 2009: 251). The following are some of the interrelated and overlapping tensions that have led to developments in educational ethnography:

- a) Whether ethnography should aim to be neutral in relation to practical or political values (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 13): some ethnographic work on the experiences of marginalised groups such as women, gays and lesbians, and ethnic minorities has been informed by perspectives that involve political engagement. Thus, the late twentieth century saw the rise of ethnographic work informed by feminism, post structuralism, critical race theory, queer theory and post-colonial theory (LeCompte, 2002:284, 285).
- b) Whether ethnography can be carried out 'on-line' or always requires participation in a physical research setting: some ethnographers argue that the nature of the research site is irrelevant in the conduct of research. This has resulted in forms of research such as virtual ethnography where, often, all data are collected online without meeting the people concerned face-to-face (Hammersley, 2006: 8).

- c) Whether ethnographic field work requires a long period of participation and on a full time basis (Hammersley, 2006:6): some ethnographers have moved away from the conventional temporal boundaries and are increasingly engaging in modes of ethnographic research where they spend a shorter length of time in the field. In addition, researchers have engaged in 'part-time participant observation' where they focus on what happens in a particular social institution or setting when it is in operation (Hammersley, 2006:4). Most sociological ethnography falls into this category, in that researchers do not live in the same community as the people they study, collecting data round the clock (p. 6). Nevertheless, they may study some aspect of people's lives, for example their work, over a relatively long period.
- d) Whether the traditional claim of ethnographers to be able to understand social reality by getting close to it can be sustained: this dispute has reflected the influence of ideas such as hermeneutics, post-structuralism (e.g. deconstruction) and post-modernism (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:12). As part of this, a new focus in ethnography has been on role of writing and authorship of the research text (Atkinson et al., 2006:14; Taylor, 2006:4). For example, there has been a move to ethnographic research that draws on discourse analysis, narrative analysis and conversation analysis (Hammersley, 2006:9; Walford, 2008:12). In addition to this, other ethnographers have focused on the use auto-ethnographical work where they explore their own selves (Atkinson et al., 2006:14).
- e) Whether ethnography should be presented or represented in traditional formats: there has been a shift in ethnographic reports described as 'the literary turn in ethnographic writing' which emphasises the rhetorical construction of 'reality' in ethnographic texts. Hence, some researchers focus on using rhetorical devices or discursive strategies to develop

analytical understanding of participants' perspectives, activities and actions (Hammersley, 2006:4, 10). A newer focus in ethnography has been the representation of ethnographic data in a variety of different styles including forms of arts such as digital video, photography, drama, theatre, dance, film poetry, visual arts, performance arts, and fictive writing, narrative, dialogue, theatrical (Bagley, 2009:252; LeCompte, 2002:292). However in practice, there has been relatively little of this in the field of education.

- f) Whether ethnography should have political goals and/or be directed towards shaping policy (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:17): some researchers have argued that ethnographic research should also be geared towards effecting change in society or to have more impact in society. As a result of this tension, new ethnographic perspectives have begun to incorporate the role of policy in ethnographic work.

Contemporary qualitative research has increasingly become a highly variegated activity (Atkinson et al., 2006:192) and a methodologically complex process (p. 189). This is seen in the extremely diverse range of methods employed as well as the growth in the range of subject matter researched (p. 15). Hence, there have been traditional forms of ethnography as well as newer forms of qualitative inquiry (Bagley, 2009:253). In light of the contested issues in ethnography, Bagley (2009) has argued that over the past 20 years a paradigmatic shift or re-envisioning of qualitative and ethnographic research has occurred (p. 251). However, others have argued that, although ethnography has been marked by differences and tensions, these do not suggest that newer forms of research have superseded the previous orthodoxy (Atkinson et al., 2006:198). On the contrary, there is still a great deal of work that is conducted and reported according to conventional criteria and in traditional formats (Atkinson et al., 2006:15). In this light, these authors have argued that rather than seeing the field of ethnography in terms of a developmental model,

it should be conceptualised in terms of continuing tensions which give the field much of its vigour and impetus (p.199).

So far, I have provided a rationale for the use of ethnography in exploring the nature of students' disengagement. My study involved a compressed, recurrent ethnographic mode because of the funding requirement of the university (see Troman and Jeffrey, 2006, chapter two). Moreover, despite the developments in ethnographic research, this study has essentially maintained a traditional format in terms of the collection, analysis and presentation of data. Having considered the nature and history of ethnography, I will proceed to describe the process of conducting and analysing the research in the following section.

SECTION TWO: METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

4.4 My Reflective Account

It has been argued that one of the failings of much interactionist-based ethnography is the non-application of theory reflexively to the process of research (Ball, 2003b:45). As such, researchers have failed to consider the methodological and practical defects of various sources of data and have not taken into account how they may have influenced their research process. In order to take account of the possible threats to validity (including reactivity and research bias) and to add methodologically rigour, Ball urged researchers to provide a reflective account of the conduct of the research. This should detail 'the processes, problems, choices and errors which describe the fieldwork upon which the substantive account is based' (p.

46). In the spirit of this, in this section, I will recount the story of my research from its uncertain beginnings through to carrying out the analysis and writing this thesis.

4.5 Beginning My Research Journey

As a novice researcher, I embarked on an ethnographic journey, with what I thought was the knowledge required to prepare for the conduct of ethnographic work. I prepared a detailed plan outlining the sources of data needed, including how these could be accessed and what contingencies would be in place should things go awry. I updated myself on how to deal with the emerging problems in the field, how to manage my research self and thought about the most appropriate means of getting to the source of the required data (see Ball, 2003b; Delamont, 2003; Hammersley, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Taylor, 2006; Walford, 2008). I reflected on the following view that seemed to linger in my mind: 'The early days of fieldwork are proverbially problematic, and may well be fraught with difficulties, (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 90). In some ways, I wanted to believe that most of the problems associated with earlier ethnographic research had begun to disappear with time and with the increasing acceptance of ethnography as a method of study. Yet, despite what I thought was adequate preparation, nothing really prepared me for what I would actually face in the field. I discovered very early in my ethnographic fieldwork that it was a very demanding, stressful and daunting process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Walford, 2008) and much like Feldman et al. (2003: vii) observed, gaining access turned out to be a 'rude surprise'. For me as a novice researcher, doing field work was like starting a new journey into the unknown and it seemed that 'being prepared, forewarned or educated in ethnography' was

insufficient (Ball, 2003b: 33). My research had two phases, namely the pilot research and the main study. The pilot research was conducted within a UK context and served as an initial phase which guided the process of my PhD research by helping to refine my focus and to clarify future plans. My PhD research journey is divided into three distinct stages which coincide with three major phases of collecting data in the field. The first stage outlines my attempts to undertake a UK-based PhD study and the other two stages describe my efforts at conducting a two-phase PhD project in the Caribbean.

4.6 Undertaking My pilot Study in the UK

My exploratory MRes research (Laurent, 2008) was a pilot study that helped to clarify my understanding of the seriousness and significance of the issue of disengagement and the impact of various contextual factors on students' proclivity to disengage. The research site was a small mixed secondary school in the Midlands with approximately 500 students. Most of these students were drawn from socially and economically deprived catchment areas with approximately three quarters of them travelling by bus. Additionally, the majority of this intake was from white British working-class background with over thirty percent being entitled to free school meals, an indicator often used to denote socio-economic disadvantage. Data was mainly gathered through interviews held with eight white British working-class girls, aged 15-16 years who were perceived by their teachers to be disengaged and four teachers who had taught the Year 11 students. Other sources of data included informal conversations with other teaching staff and final year students, school

documents such as students' assessment data and term reports, as well as reflective observation notes.

The participants in the pilot study were aware that they disengaged in certain lessons and highlighted factors that influenced their behaviours. They were particularly sensitive to problems involving relationships and tensions at home; their personal goal and competing interests including work priorities; the strong influence of peers; the organisation of their school curriculum and their relationships with teachers. Of importance was that for some of the participants that these issues began earlier in their school years and came to head in later years through the manifestation of visible signs of disengagement.

The main source of data used in the pilot was the interviews held with teachers and students. This research tool proved to be beneficial in generating information on students' actions, motives, beliefs and experiences (Seale, 1998). However, the pilot highlighted the discrepancy between the teachers' views and students' account of their experiences. For example, teachers' ignorance of contextual factors shaping students' behaviours led them to label students as disengaged with the consequence that students lived up to teachers' definitions. In view of the methodological and practical defects of interview data (Hammersley and Gomm, 2005), there was need to substantiate interview with other sources of data. As a result of the pilot study, it became clear that my PhD thesis would address the various ways in which students manifested forms of disengagement to learning and school. Besides, the inconsistency in participants' accounts underscored the need to corroborate students' account with other data sources to gain an enhanced description of students' behaviour. Hence, the PhD study would also examine specific ways in which other contextual factors engender forms of disengagement.

It was not possible to explore these issues in the same research site that I had undertaken my pilot study due to emerging difficulties faced by the school at that time. Among these drawbacks were the facts that the incumbent head teacher had resigned and the school became federated with another more successful school in the county. I therefore sought to conduct my PhD research in a similar school in the South East of England. Given the link between academic achievement and disengagement as highlighted by previous researchers (Appleton et al., 2008; Black, 2006; Fredricks et al., 2004), I was interested in conducting research at a school whose latest overall GCSE result was either at or below the national baseline level. Furthermore, I felt that such a school would enable me to identify and explore the factors that may engender forms of disengagement.

4.7 My Initial Research Design

In retrospect, my PhD research project was quite an ambitious one. Originally, I had intended to carry out a comparative ethnographic analysis of disengagement in Britain and the Caribbean by focusing on a secondary school in each research context. This study had turned out to be too broad to undertake within the PhD time limit and I had chose to concentrate on understanding disengagement within a UK context. Although I had modified my research proposal and research plans to reflect this focus, the new project turned out to be equally grand. I had designed a work plan requiring me to spend two years in a British secondary school where I would undertake three cycles of research each year. However, upon the advice of my supervisors, I had to opt for a much shorter time in the field and consequently planned to carry out the fieldwork within one year. The

research was designed to be conducted in a two-phase process. The first phase would set the stage for the selection of potential students to participate in the project. Instead of relying on the selection of students by teachers based on their own definitions of disengagement, a general questionnaire would be administered to all Year Nine students in one school. This would ask about their level of participation in learning and school. On the basis of the responses garnered, ten Year Nine students would be selected for in-depth study. During the second phase, I would undertake three cycles of intense fieldwork each lasting one month. Data would be gathered from a variety of sources, including lesson observations, informal chats and interviews with students, teachers and parents (carers) as well as school documents, in an effort to gain a full understanding of students' disengagement at school. However, my plan fell apart as a result of problems of accessing the data and I had to alter my research design to suit the emerging conditions in the field.

4.8 Conducting My PhD Research Within a UK Context

The problems of site entry and access proved to be difficult in the UK and as I found out that entry did not guarantee me access to all the relevant data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 61; Troman, 2006:1). Gaining access to a school was facilitated through a telephone conversation with a local government councillor in October, 2008. Discussion about the schooling of my children led to talks about my research. This sparked the interest of the councillor, who at that time served in the capacity of Chair of the Children's Trust and whose Cabinet Portfolio was on Children. The councillor gladly welcomed my carrying out research in the area and gave me the names of three schools (in terms of her preference A, B and C based on the relative overall improvement made) that might be suitable sites to undertake

my research. She also volunteered to contact the head teachers of the schools (whom she knew personally) to facilitate the conduct of my research. The schools identified were classed as 'National Challenge Schools' because they had failed on more than one occasion to achieve the national base line GCSE result (which at that time was that at least 30 per cent of examination pupils should gain five or more GCSEs at A* to C, including both English and Mathematics).

I spoke to the councillor again in December, 2008 and, as a first choice, she approached the head of School A as it had made huge improvement since its designation as 'National Challenge School'. The councillor instructed me to contact her the following day when she gave me an informal approval from the head teacher. I had a formal telephone conversation with the head teacher's personal assistant and was asked to submit a written proposal outlining my research. This was submitted electronically on December 15th, 2008. The head teacher arranged to meet with me on January 8th, 2009 to discuss the research further. Although he welcomed my proposal at the meeting and was happy for me to conduct research in the school, he noted that there was a slight hiccup: there was already a group conducting research at the school and he would have to liaise with them so that my research would be facilitated. However, on January 19th, 2009, I received an email from School A, indicating their decision to withdraw all research projects due to 'current pressing circumstances at the school' which I later learnt was an imminent Ofsted inspection. This situation was not a new occurrence as it had already been cited by Troman (2006) as an explanation for the denial of entry into an educational setting (p. 7-9).

During the month of December, 2008, the councillor had invited me to apply for the role of Governor at School C which was being turned into an academy. In

this regard, I contacted the head teacher of the academy via email on December 16th, 2008 and a meeting scheduled for January 6th, 2009. After a fifteen minute discussion with the head teacher of the Academy I was given the temporary position of Governor. However, I was unaware that this role would have any consequences for the conduct of my research. Hence, when I had been turned down by School A, I contacted School C. I was informed that it would not be appropriate to conduct research at the school by virtue of my current position as Governor. Additionally, I was told that since the school would soon be under new leadership it would not be feasible to begin any research there as it needed time to settle into its current status as academy. This being the case, I was hoping that I would not be turned down by the head teacher of school B.

On January 20th, 2009 the councillor asked me to contact School B. She gave me the details of the head teacher and instructed me to use her as a reference. I contacted the head teacher of that school and was asked to submit an electronic copy of my proposal which I did on January 29th, 2009. Subsequently, on February 11th, 2009, I received an email from School B inviting me to attend a meeting on February 24th, 2009 to discuss the research further. The meeting lasted approximately fifteen minutes and at the end of the discussion I was given oral permission to undertake research at School B. The head teacher then advised me that as soon as I had gained ethical approval he would put me in touch with someone at the school who would be my official point of contact for conducting the research. Full ethical approval was sought from the Open University Ethics Committee during the month of February, 2009. During my ethical application, there was an issue with obtaining the informed consent of participants without the use of deception. Students were not to be informed of the basis of their selection. I justified this on the grounds that the harm that would arise from withholding information from

them would be less than the harm involved in informing the participants of the reason why they had been selected. Having clarified certain issues in the application, full ethical approval was granted on April 24th, 2009 (see Appendix 1).

Having gained ethical approval I returned to School B. Two contact persons at the school (who I refer to as site liaison officers) were appointed by the head teacher to help facilitate my research there. An initial meeting with these individuals who served in the capacity of behaviour manager (BM) and head of year (HOY) took place on May 5th, 2009. It turned out that although I was granted entry to the school, access to students was controlled by these two gatekeepers. The BM was selected as a site liaison officer by virtue of her close working relationship with all staff and the HOY had volunteered to assist her. On the surface, the BM seemed to act under the authority of the head teacher and tried to support me: 'Leave it to me and I will get you to see some lessons' she said. However, she turned out to be quite a domineering figure, who wanted to have a strong influence over the progress of the project and it seemed that I had to work on her terms:

I have to check my schedule to see when you can come in. I am only free on the 25th can you make it then? My aim is to get you the students you need so that you can get out of here as soon as possible.

Extract of conversation with BM

On her own, the HOY seemed to be more considerate and accommodating:

'I have done my masters and I know what it is to do research...most of the staff here wouldn't understand because they only have first degrees. .. You're quite welcome to visit any of my lessons... If you need any other information just let me know'. However, the BM seemed to exercise control over the direction of the project and this was quite evident during joint meetings. As such, some of the HOY's decisions

were intercepted by the BM and I found myself negotiating classroom access with both these individuals.

Before students could complete the survey I had to mail a letter of consent home to parents, guardians or carers. A total of 130 letters were posted on May 20th, with a response expected by June 2nd, 2009 (see Appendix 2c-i); however by June 15th, 2009, I had only received 6 responses. Such a low response rate did not make it feasible for the survey to be conducted. Besides, it did not allow me the opportunity to choose the sample in an objective way. I suggested calling parents to ask for their consent; however, the BM felt that the response rate would hardly be improved and that I should be prepared to get calls being cut off by indifferent parents. These concerns were discussed with my supervisors and as an alternative it was suggested that I recruit students via classroom observation.

In this regard, a meeting was organized with the site liaison officers on June 18th, 2009 to discuss this change in research method. However, the BM felt that since teachers had a full time table and they were otherwise busy, I would only be allowed to do two lesson observations. Thus, this intensity of work was presented as an explanation for the limited access to classrooms (Troman, 2006: 5). In this regard, the BM and HOY provided me with a list of approximately twenty students to observe in two lessons and it was suggested that after the observations we would meet again to decide who would be the ten selected students. Furthermore, after the sample was chosen I would be required to make scripted calls (which would have to be first sanctioned by the head teacher) to their parents. I was not satisfied with this arrangement and after discussions with my supervisors, it was suggested that I should request some more time (at least one week) for these observations. At the next meeting I brought up this proposal but the BM refused to grant further

observations for a week. Rather, I was allowed only two additional days, this being justified on the grounds that teachers would clearly object to my presence in their classroom. It seemed to me that perhaps there might have been a concern expressed by the BM that my presence in the class would increase work levels for teachers or otherwise upset their lessons (Troman, 2006: 6). Thus, the BM assumed the position of the gatekeeper and spoke on behalf of teachers without allowing the staff to speak for themselves.

The relationship established with gatekeepers can have consequences for the conduct and development of ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 58) and I was grateful that I had managed to develop a good working relation with the HOY. Thus, in desperation, I used this relation to my benefit and I decided to hold a private meeting with her to explain my situation. She was quite supportive, remarking that 'I see no problems in you doing research; I'll have to run that by R [referring to the head teacher]. This meeting was fruitful and I was granted six more days (a total of eight days) for lesson observations during the period including 3rd July to 16th July, 2009. Since I did not discuss this with BM I felt that I should avoid her on all counts and from then on I began to liaise only with the HOY.

However, I still had to negotiate access with classroom teachers for lesson observations. I was given copies of the students' time table and it was decided that I should shadow certain students for the day. This meant being in various lessons as students were taught in groups according to their ability levels. The HOY emailed all staff about my project and of my purpose in the school. For the first two days, she introduced me to a few teachers who agreed to allow me to observe their lessons. However, for the balance of the time I had to find my way to lessons, having to explain the purpose of my research to teachers each time I visited a

different class. A few teachers welcomed me and others denied me access to their lessons. Moreover, even among those who welcomed me some tended to see me as 'critic' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 64) and sought my assessment of their lesson whereas others acted as research facilitator and provided me with advice on the conduct of my research.

One crucial task that lay before me was to develop and maintain a rapport with students and I tried to accomplish this by seeking to manage their impression of me (Ball, 2003b:32; see also Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 66-73). I wanted to present myself as researcher rather than adopt the role of the 'potential teacher' as I had been described by the HOY and some teachers. In this regard, I dressed in a semi-formal way; I showed an interest in students' social activities; I engaged in 'ordinary topics of conversation' and ignored rule infractions. Gaining students' trust was quite important for me since I felt like an outsider, being a black researcher going into a school where the majority of students were from white British working-class background.

My lesson observations, which were undertaken during the last two weeks of the school year, did not go as expected due to factors such as the denial of access to lessons and the high number of cover lessons. Although I had managed to develop some social relations in the field, I knew that negotiation of access would be a recurrent preoccupation for me (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:61). I left the research site with more questions than I started with. Some of these included: How do I get rid of feelings of anger, frustration and incompetence? How much fieldwork will I get to do? Do I avoid certain lessons and teachers in the future? Will I be able to gain data about life beyond the classroom? Will I get access to all the relevant data available at this school? Do I have the patience, diplomacy and boldness

required to get the data needed? I was approaching the end of the first year of my study and was still unsure about the future direction of my project. Yet, I reflected on the advice that in an effort to get to the source of my data, I would of necessity have 'to tolerate situations, actions and people which one disapproves or that one finds distasteful or shocking (Hammersley, 2005a cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:72). This provided some sort of courage and impetus for pursuing my research project.

Hence, at the end of July, 2009, I informed the HOY that I would be sending out letters to teachers, seeking their consent for me to conduct lesson observations in the coming term. During the first week of the month of September, 2009, I was provided with the list of 44 staff members who were teaching the Year Nine classes. I sent letters to them via the school, seeking permission to observe their lessons (Appendix 2b-i). Half way through the month I had received no responses and asked the HOY to issue a gentle emailed reminder to staff. By the end of September I received two responses. When I re-contacted the school the HOY informed me that teachers she had spoken to were willing to allow me access on condition that I did not audio tape or video record the lessons. I contacted the HOY again during the first week of November and by the end of that month I had received two more responses. I was told to wait for some more responses before proceeding with the research. It appeared that my hope of conducting research in a UK context was beginning to fade. Clearly, the problem of obtaining access to the school was proving to be quite difficult during the initial stages of my research and I would have to draw on various resources or strategies to deal with the situation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:41). Since I was increasingly pressed for time, I began to turn my attention to conducting my research within a Caribbean context. In fact, I had

begun to consider researching in the Caribbean as a possibility much earlier in the research process since I felt that gaining access would be easier there.

4.9 Researching Within a Caribbean Context: Phase One

During the month of June while the fieldwork was progressing slowly in the UK I gave thought to my contingency plan, that of conducting research in St Lucia. My initial thoughts were that given my cultural background and wide teaching experience it would be relatively easy to gain entry into secondary schools there. I discussed these developments with my supervisors and it was suggested that I go for a month initially to see the feasibility of pursuing fieldwork in the Caribbean, though I was advised to continue negotiation with the UK school. I opted to visit St. Lucia during the period October 3rd to November 4th, 2009.

Negotiations in St. Lucia began in June, 2009, when I tried to contact relevant personnel at the MOE for research permission. At the same time, I had begun to identify schools that would make potential case studies. Given the relationship between school outcomes and disengagement (Alexander et al., 2001; Appleton et al., 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004; Glanville and Wildhagen, 2007; Lessard et al., 2008), I identified five schools that either had a past or current history of low academic performance. I tried to contact these schools and was able to secure a conditional verbal approval from one school pending receipt and acceptance of a research proposal. Having contacted the MOE, I emailed a letter seeking permission for research (Appendix 2a) along with a research proposal on June 24th, 2009 for consideration. I also emailed my proposal to the head teacher

on June 25th, 2009. During the month of July I was granted approval for research at the secondary school. However by the end of August I had still not heard from the MOE despite previous attempts to contact them. I decided that if I had not heard from them before my departure, I would contact them on my arrival in St. Lucia. Nevertheless, I was enthusiastic about the research and was hoping that it would be a more fruitful endeavour.

4.9.1 The Research Setting

The research was conducted at the Southall Secondary School in St. Lucia¹⁸ (henceforth called Southall). The history and organisation of this school provided the backdrop for the collection and analysis of the data. The background information about Southall is discussed in terms of the research site, the staffroom, structure of the classroom, teaching resource, preparation for learning, lesson arrangements and lesson structure. This information was garnered mainly from questionnaire data from thirteen teachers, who varied in the length of time they had been at the school (from 10 months to 22 years).

4.9.2 The Research Site

Southall was one of twenty-four secondary schools in operation in St. Lucia. This institution first opened its doors as a co-educational junior secondary (or middle) school in the early 1970s before being upgraded to a fully-fledged secondary school in the late 1980s. Southall has a large catchment area with a population approximating 650 students. Teachers reported that while some students

¹⁸ The identity of all individuals and names of places have been anonymised to protect confidentiality as far as possible.

live in the nearby communities in the vicinity of the school, others travel from all areas of the island with many of them drawn from rural communities. Additionally, teachers reported that students attending Southall are 'average learners of mixed ability' from various social backgrounds. However, one teacher remarked that 'most students are of low-socio economic status and there are quite a lot of students from lower income households and ghettos'.

Most teachers reported that the public did not esteem Southall highly during its initial twenty years of existence as it was initially perceived as an 'institution for low achievers' or 'backward children'. However, this perception changed 'as the school soon moved to the top because of the attitude of students' and it gradually became seen as 'a good one'. One teacher was of the view that this change in perception was also aided by the fact that students had begun to achieve a high overall pass rate (over 75%) at the CXC examination. Additionally, teachers recounted that Southall has traditionally been informally ranked as a fifth choice school placement by the public. Nevertheless, many students explained that Southall was not their school of first choice.

The Staffroom

The staffroom at Southall was a confined area located at the bottom of a two-floor building block which served as a working area for the majority of teachers who did not have a specialist teaching room¹⁹ while providing some needed comfort for all staff. The staffroom consisted of a long chain of desks and chairs facing each other in the centre of the room, along with a series of desks and chairs arranged

¹⁹ These specialist rooms were designed for teaching practical subjects. These rooms contained a desk and chair for teachers as well as ample storage space.

against the walls. Storage for departments' use was provided in the form of small wooden wall units or five-drawer metal tower cabinets. One area of the staffroom served as a kitchenette and contained a small sink unit, a six-foot refrigerator as well as a microwave. Teachers were also in close proximity to the male and female staff toilets, which were accessible through the staffroom. Although the staffroom was built with louvered windows on each of two sides designed to provide some comfort from the heat, there were also two fans available to ease any excess heat in the room. In addition, teachers had access to wireless internet connection and cable television in their staffroom. However, despite their comforts, those teachers based in the staffroom were faced with two major problems, namely a shortage of chairs along with insufficient storage space.

Structure of the Classroom

The Form Three students at Southall were housed in an elongated hut. The classrooms there were small rectangular units also built with louvered windows on each of two sides to admit light and ventilation in the hot weather, but to keep out rain, direct sunshine, and noise. The classrooms were partitioned to the front and back. However, the wooden partition and louvered windows failed to keep out auditory and visual distractions even from neighbouring classes, and offered some opportunities for disorder and noise. The classrooms were of a traditional structure, having a blackboard to the front of the class with the desks and chairs arranged in a six by six matrix leaving little room to manoeuvre around. Unlike the specialist teaching classroom, the majority of the classrooms had no desks or chairs for teachers' use as well as no storage areas. Apart from the basic physical material, the classrooms were bare: there was hardly any use of wall charts and posters or displays of students' work. Besides, all classrooms had a garbage bin located

inside the room, near the doors. During my second visit to Southall, three of the four classes of Form Three students were relocated on the second floor of a concrete building block. These classrooms had the same traditional structure although the noise level was significantly reduced because of the concrete partitions.

Teaching Resources

Schools in St. Lucia are provided with resources in accordance with specific allocations by the MOE. The bursar at Southall was responsible for the disbursement of resources to departments or teachers on request. All teachers were provided with basic teaching materials which included chalk and duster. Apart from this, there was very little use of technology or other resources in the delivery of the curriculum at Southall. For example, there was no form of audio-visual equipment or information technology (IT) for use in the classroom to augment the learning process or to facilitate student learning. In addition there was no library or intranet facility in the school. However, there was an IT suite containing twenty computers for use in IT lessons. There was also a Learning Resource Centre which could be booked for teaching. This centre had five computers for general use and had a laptop as well as internet access and a digital projector for teaching purposes. Students only had access to the computers during recess times and after school but had to pay to use them.

Preparation for Learning

Many lessons relied on the use of textbooks or notes given. Although, there was a published list of recommended texts provided by the MOE, not all schools

prescribed the same required texts for students. Moreover, the school texts were subject to change from year to year to reflect updated versions or content that enabled ease of understanding to facilitate student learning. Students were required to purchase the set text for each subject area. If students could not afford the books, they could purchase second-hand copies at a reduced cost from charitable organisations or roadside vendors. Sometimes, government bursaries were given to students to help with the purchase of texts. However, students in receipt of bursaries had to perform satisfactorily, passing their term grades; otherwise the bursary would have been withdrawn if their performance was poor. Students at Southall did not have access to lockers and were required to bring in the prescribed texts, exercise books, notebooks and basic equipment (pen, pencil, erasers, rulers or as decided by the subject) to every class on a daily basis. Although this was a school rule which was subject to sanction if not adhered to, it was hardly enforced as some lessons saw many students with no text books.

Lesson Arrangements

Throughout the school year, the Form Three students at Southall studied a total of nineteen compulsory subjects. These subjects were arranged in two blocks for teaching purposes, namely the academic and practical blocks (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Subject arrangement for teaching

| | |
|---|--|
| Academic Block (Whole Group teaching) | English Language and Literature, Family Life Education, French, Introduction to Business, Mathematics, Social Studies, Spanish |
| Practical block (Half group teaching) | Agriculture, Biology, Chemistry, Clothing and Textiles, Food and Nutrition, Information Technology, Music, Physical Education, Technical Drawing, Theatre Arts, Visual Arts, Woods |

Academic lessons were taught to whole-class mixed ability groups and those with some practical element were taught to half-class sized mixed ability groups. Students who were selected to study the subjects in the practical block were split into two groups based on the alphabetical listing of surnames, as taken from the class register. Students with surnames from A-M were placed in one group and those from N-Z were in a different group. Subjects in the practical block were paired into six groups and were taught to half class-sized groups on an alternative basis each term. For example, during the first term, half of the class (Group A) would study Biology and the other half (Group B) would study Chemistry. During the second and third terms, the subjects would be reversed so that Group A would study Biology during two of the three school terms and Group B would study Chemistry twice. Thus, students studied thirteen subjects during a given term, which included seven academic and six practical subjects.

Lesson Structure

Lessons at Southall were generally forty minutes long. These lessons were generally based on a transmission model of teaching (see Evans, 2006) being normally teacher-led with teachers seen as expositors (Cummings, 1983) and inhabiting a small space to the front of the classroom. Lessons were divided into two main phases. During the first phase, the teacher stood in front of the class and introduced the lesson by giving an explanation or some form of instruction to the class. A few lessons had starter activities where the teacher gave an example, demonstration or a short activity to help students to complete the subsequent activities. Sometimes the teacher recapped the preceding lesson before moving on to the main activity. At other times, the teacher moved straight into the main activity. During the second phase the main class activity took place where new information

was presented to the students. This usually took the form of the teacher dictating notes to the class complemented by or followed with teacher-led class discussions. At times, the main class activity took the form of students answering questions in their exercise books; on a few occasions group tasks would be given. If written tasks were done, some teachers would circulate around the class to assist students with the given activity. Other teachers would sit at their desk or occupy an empty seat at a student's desk usually at the front of the class and students would come up to have their work assessed. In other cases, the corrections for the activity would be done as a whole-class exercise. When this was the case, students would be called to the blackboard to write out the answer or they would have to give the solution/answers orally. Most of the lessons observed had no formal plenary sessions and oftentimes the main class activity ended with the ringing of the school bell. At this juncture, the teacher concluded the lesson by giving the class some instructions or making an announcement. The teacher normally asked students to complete the class task as a home assignment, hand in the exercise to be checked or marked, or informed the class that they would continue with the activity at the next lesson. In some cases, students said a closing prayer before being dismissed²⁰.

4.9.3 Fitting in at Southall Secondary School

With permission granted by the head teacher, I set forth to conduct my research at Southall. There, I presented myself as a student-researcher working on a project. The head teacher had already informed the staff of my presence before my arrival at a staff meeting. However, during morning staff briefing on the first day

²⁰ It was customary in some lessons for students to have prayers at the beginning of the first lesson, the end of the lesson preceding lunch, at the beginning of the lesson after lunch and at the end of the last lesson of the school day.

of my arrival, he again sought the cooperation of the staff. Reflecting on my UK field experiences, I felt that it was necessary for me to be seen as an accepted member of the school community and from the outset I realised that I had some adjustment to do if I were to make any progress in the field. I had to manage the staff's impression of me and gain their acceptance of me as an insider. In an attempt to fit in, I made myself comfortable at an empty desk in the staffroom as I was not shown to a seat. However, it seemed that I would be kept out of the staffroom as there was a shortage of chairs. I was invited to use the chair belonging to a teacher who had been absent for two days. Nevertheless, I wished to have my own chair and upon enquiries, was directed to the Clothing and Textiles room where I could borrow one; sadly, two days later the chair was taken by someone else. Undeterred by this incident, I picked a plastic chair from another classroom which was unlike the padded wooden ones currently used by staff. Fortunately, this move worked and I was able to retain my chair until the end of the fieldwork - in essence I had made some progress in securing a place at the school. As an element of impression management, monitoring my personal appearance was also a salient consideration (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:67) and it was necessary for me to alter my appearance and habit a little in order to reduce any sharp differences with school staff. Thus, I abandoned my semi-formal clothing which I had bought along to cope with the Caribbean weather and purchased more formal clothing. I also bought a lunch bag and prepared a daily meal which seemed to be the custom of most staff members.

As in the UK context, a member of staff was nominated with whom I had to liaise. Mrs Bob was a non-teaching staff member, who turned out to be quite cooperative and accommodating. We discussed the types of data I would need and I was given as much help as possible. However, I experienced some difficulties and

again realised that the problem of access did not end once entry to the school had been gained (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Thus, I had to go through a process of negotiating and renegotiating access in the field through social interactions with others to navigate my way to sources of data (Parker-Webster and John, 2010:189). I was of the view that my insider status as St Lucian and a teacher would allow me to engage with various groups and subgroups. On the other side, my outsider status as UK-based resident and researcher would allow me to maintain some distance and provide some analytic purchase (Fournillier, 2009). However, it turned out that although I had the advantage of being an insider by virtue of my cultural background and teaching experience, my academic and residential status positioned me as an outsider and I did not get automatic access to all sources of data, especially from the teaching staff. For instance, most staff went about their duties and did not initiate a conversation with me. However, I realised that I had to make a lot of the first moves and work on building rapport with them. In the early stages I achieved limited success in developing staff relations and was only able to make some progress when I remained in the staff room after school and played a few games of dominoes with staff members there; it was then I found opportunities to engage in 'small talk' with various teachers and this facilitated my access in terms of arranging teacher interviews and lesson observations.

4.9.4 Selection of Year Group

As part of my research focus I opted to explore the nature of disengagement among the Form Three year group at Southall as previous research had suggested a link between disengagement and adolescence. In particular, the literature review indicated that disengagement is exacerbated during the period of adolescence when individuals face many challenges (Balfanz et al., 2007; Garnier et al., 2007)

and 'for some students, the early adolescence years marked the beginning of a downward spiral leading to academic failure and school dropout' (Eccles, 1999:37). Besides, it was suggested that students' satisfaction with learning and school work came to a head in Year 9 and Year 10 when it was possible for many students to experience what Cole (2006) called a 'mid school crisis' (Black, 2006: 5). During the first week of my fieldwork, I briefly explained my research project to all the students in Form Three (Year Nine). Those who did not wish to participate were instructed to inform me verbally or indicate so to their home room teacher. Additionally, if parents did not wish their child to participate they had to sign the consent form provided to indicate their disapproval (see Appendix 2c-ii). Since I did not receive any forms from parents I took this to mean that they did not object to their children participating in the research.

4.9.5 Sources of Data

Questionnaire

I had already prepared some questionnaires for use in my UK-based study, and I felt that they could be appropriate here too as a recruitment tool (see Appendix 3b). Rather than serve as a major source of information, the questionnaires were meant to provide a preliminary examination of students' perceptions of their learning as well as their general views on school and home life. Having piloted the questionnaire in the UK, I anticipated that it would take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. To this end, Mrs Bob arranged with some home teachers to administer the questionnaires to students and these were completed with a 90% response rate. Students were asked to indicate at the end of the questionnaire whether they were willing to participate further in the research and

the majority gave their consent. Those students who objected to participating further in the research were not to be included in subsequent data collection and analysis. My next step would be to carry out some lesson observations and later seek other types of data from a small sample of students.

Lesson Observation

Permission to observe lessons was not immediately forthcoming. I gave out letters to 26 staff who taught the Form three students (see Appendix 2b-i) and got 7 responses within a week. I proceeded to liaise with these 7 teachers so I could observe their lessons when possible. However, in St. Lucia, the month of October was designated as cultural heritage month and classes were constantly interrupted with activities marking this observance. This made it difficult to observe lessons and I found myself negotiating access for each lesson that I wanted to observe. In the meantime, the vice principal tried to solicit the support of other staff members and by the end of the month I had observed the lessons of 13 teachers with their consent. It was during the latter part of the fieldwork that I learnt the reason for teachers' initial resistance to observations. Some teachers stated that my proposal was not circulated among teachers and they were unaware of the purpose of my visit, having been absent when the announcements were made. Other staff declined to participate because they did not want to be audio or video recorded. Still others claimed that they did not receive a consent form. This last reason baffled me for I had placed the letters in teachers' letter boxes. However, I found out that these boxes were hardly used by a significant number of staff except to collect their salary statement at the end of the month.

During lesson observations I discreetly carved a niche for myself in most of the classrooms where I was able to sit without obstructing students. As such, I occupied a spot to the front left of the small classroom as this was the only available sitting space. Since most, if not all, the classes had no extra furniture including a teacher's desk and chair for use, I sat at a vacant student desk or sought an available chair from a nearby classroom. Not all classes were held in their main classroom and I followed students to those lessons where they were taught in other specialised rooms. Classroom observation, it seemed, was a rare occurrence, and at first, students appeared to stare questioningly at me. However, I avoided eye contact with teachers and students until I was certain that they had grown accustomed to seeing me in the classroom. This behaviour confirmed the assumption that as the researcher becomes a more familiar presence 'the participants are less likely to behave uncharacteristically' (Walford, 2008:9). Thus, once students had discovered that I cast a blind eye or maintained deaf ears and failed to report them they began to relax in my presence. Observation notes took the form of brief jottings. I made general classroom observations on the main teaching procedures and how students responded to different aspects of the teaching. I also noted interesting developments or situations occurring in the class in terms of teacher-student relations and student-student relations.

I expanded my field notes in the evening when I was more relaxed and was able to recall and reflect on the day's events. Moreover, the organisation of the notes was facilitated by the use of three different sized notebooks. I had a small A6 pocket-sized ring binder which fitted easily fit into my handbag. It was used for making classroom jottings but also for scribbling down key words, names and apt phrases when the opportunity arose to prompt my memory later (Woods 1986: 44). I used an A5 notebook as a daily academic diary for recording other school

information apart from classroom observations e.g. students' academic records, parental contacts, school schedules, interview times and reminders. I also had an A4 research journal which I used to help me manage my research project. Furthermore, it was used to document other aspects of my fieldwork including reflections, theoretical insights and analytical memos (Charmaz, 2006).

Interviews

Interviews with students were held late in the month when I had built some sort of rapport with them. Although my intention was to interview a selected sample of students, I had to abandon this idea and instead chose those who volunteered. Students' availability for the interview depended on the nature of the lesson that they were having. Thus, teachers granted me permission in cases where they felt there was little interruption to the student's learning. I also seized the opportunity to interview students when their teacher was absent from the lesson. Due to limited space in the school, it was difficult to get a spare room to hold interviews. Although there were at least two bookable rooms these were hardly ever free. Hence, with students' consent, most interviews were held on the outside lunch tables. Although these were not ideal they facilitated the conduct of the interview with just a few interruptions.

During the initial phase of the interview I explained the purpose of the conversation, including the use of audio recorder; I reassured participants that their information was confidential and I informed them of their right to end the interview if they wished to or to refuse to answer any question that they felt uncomfortable with. The interview took a semi-formal form and I used an interview schedule which consisted of broad questions about students' schooling experience (see Appendix

4a). It was hoped that these questions would facilitate the conversation with the participants, allowing them to be genuine and to express their opinions. Minimum writing was done except as a prompt for issues that needed clarification or elaboration.

Despite the fact that students volunteered to be interviewed, they were not so forthcoming with their responses. Thus, they provided cursory responses to questions posed despite my probing, and seemed reticent about opening up to the researcher. It was suggested in unsolicited conversations with students and parents that this behaviour was a common expectation in some parts of the St. Lucian society. Thus, children were not socialised into holding sustained conversations with adults, and as a sign of respect to elders they were not supposed to stare at them or interrupt them in a conversation unless spoken to. Nonetheless, this practice was changing in certain family and school settings. Many students indicated their desire to be interviewed but by the end of the fieldwork I was only able to interview twelve of them. Additionally, I had conversations with two home room teachers, one class teacher, the HOY as well as two parents and in each case this necessitated the development of different sets of social relations to get the relevant data.

On reflection, it seemed that once in the field, all advice that I had been given and read about vanished and some of my well laid plans, including my week by week schedules, had to be abandoned. I was left alone with my individual self as the primary research tool (Ball, 2003b: 32). For the most part, this meant engaging myself in the field and making the most critical decisions that would determine the future direction of my research project. Moreover, as a researcher exploring the topic of student disengagement, there almost seemed to be a personal obligation to

remain engaged in the field. In this sense, as I found out, I had to be attentive to the demands of my fieldwork. As such, I had to be thinking and acting on the go, that is, thinking almost on the spur of the moment, being willing and ready to make impromptu decisions and seize opportunities to get to the relevant sources of data. In essence, my ethnographic fieldwork necessitated a sort of mental, physical and emotional investment on my part which would allow me to endure to the end of the project.

While I was faced with some issues that were not unique to either of the two research settings (that is UK and Caribbean), my research biography placed me in different relations with participants in the field and gave me differing access to the sources of data in each setting. Besides, although the problems that I faced in the earlier stages of my research in the UK helped to shape the conduct of the field work during the later stages, I still had to navigate my way through new situations in the research sites and seek ways to manage my research self. Nevertheless, I hoped that this fieldwork phase would serve as a learning experience for the conduct of further research.

4.10 Researching Within a Caribbean Context: Phase Two

After the first phase of the research in St. Lucia I was able to withdraw from the field to reflect on the data collection process, the problems and issues arising and improvements to be made. I also saw this retreat from the field as a means of monitoring and stabilising my research self. This was necessary as I encountered the occasional problem of 'reversion' (Woods, 1986: 26) where I reverted to the role

of teacher. I yielded to this temptation when I began writing some notes and descriptions that were quite judgmental in nature. Thus, standing back from the field and reviewing the data, allowed me to adjust my field roles accordingly and to be more open in my attitude towards the field. Moreover, leaving the field was also a chance to make selective strategic choices about my research (Ball, 2003b: 41). Consequently, after discussions with my supervisors, I was able to clarify my research focus and to modify my research design to include other potential sources of information. My aim was to focus on patterns of disengagement manifested in the classroom, or in school more generally, with informants' accounts being used to illuminate or illustrate these behaviours. This would necessitate classroom observation across a variety of contexts. Furthermore, to shed light on factors engendering disengagement, I would have to draw on other sources of data such as sociometric tests, students' logs as well as interviews with students, parents and teachers. I also had to gather extant information on the development of education in the region including an educational history of the research site.

By the beginning of March, 2010, I was more certain that I wanted to return to St. Lucia, given that I was pressed for time and was making little progress with the UK school. By then, I had done an initial analysis of my fieldwork experience, assessed the difficulties encountered, revised my research plan in light of these pitfalls, and made provision for the use of different sources of data. On February 25th, I sent a report of the fieldwork to the head teacher, and contacted him again on March 6th, 2010, for permission to conduct further research. This was to take place during the period from April 26th to June 25th, 2010. I was then informed that I had to fill out an application form as a new requirement. On March 26th, 2010, I was able to contact the secretary to the Chief Education Officer (CEO), who emailed me an application form to be completed. The form had to be signed by my supervisor and

then emailed back to the Ministry of Education (MOE). Next, I had to wait for the CEO to approve my research as indicated by the signing of the application form. Finally, I would have to present a signed copy of the form to the head teacher before I could commence further research. This application form was signed by my supervisor on April 1st and a scanned copy was emailed to the MOE on April 7th, 2010. One week before my departure, I inquired about the status of the form and learned that it had not yet been signed. Since I would be arriving in St. Lucia one day before the commencement of my research, I arranged to have the signed form collected on April 24th, 2010, so that I could hand it to the head teacher on April 26th, 2010. With this initial site entry approved I began to relax a little as I was well on my way to continuing my fieldwork from where I left off in November, 2009.

Once back in the field, I had to re-establish or develop relations with teachers, students, and parents. Although, I could not be seen as entirely an insider or an outsider (Le Gallais, 2003; Naples, 1996), I had to be attentive to the problem of 'going native' or 'going observationalist' (Labaree, 2002 cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:87). As a solution, I tried to assume a marginal position in the field but realised that, in practice, I was actually occupying 'the space between' that is, adopting positions of both insider and outsider (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009:60). This was noticeable during the previous phase of research, where I had experienced different moments of being either an insider or outsider, roles which were relative to the cultural values and norms of both the researcher and participants (Merriam et al., 2001:416). Thus, I had to maintain a fluid status as I was constantly involved in shifting relations (Griffith, 1998; Naples, 1996) with different 'Others' (Griffith, 1998) in the field in my attempt to gather the relevant data. There was the possibility that my field identity could shift subtly or even dramatically and I hoped that I was flexible enough to cope with the requirements of the field (Ball, 2003b: 38).

4.10.1 Selection of Core Informants

After two weeks of whole classroom observation at Southall, I was able to select eight students in the Form Three year group for further participation in the research. During my observations there were several students who were frequently cautioned or reprimanded by their teachers. Although these could have been perceived as ideal disengagers, I was keen to examine the full range of forms of disengagement, so I felt that there was a need to use more concrete selection criteria. Thus, selection of the students was done strategically through the use of teacher interviews and official documents. Given that disengagement is often associated with low academic achievement (Appleton et al., 2008; Black, 2006; Fredricks et al., 2004), I used key indicators such as descriptions of academic performance and achievement scores, as well as classroom observation, as the main basis for selection.

I interviewed four teachers who either taught or had daily contacts with one or more of the four classes in the Form Three year group (namely, 3B, 3E, 3S, ST). Of the four teachers interviewed, two taught all four classes and were form tutors of one of the classes, one teacher taught two classes and was form tutor of one other class and the last teacher taught one class but was the HOY of Form Three. All teachers were interviewed in the staffroom. During the interview, teachers provided an account of some of the difficulties they encountered in their teaching. Additionally, they were given a list of students that they taught or had contact with and they provided a description of those they could remember. In selecting the final eight students I focused on key words which described students' academic performance such as 'underachieving', 'poor worker', 'does not take school work seriously', 'not working hard enough', 'capable of doing better', 'not putting enough

effort'. I also examined students' school records and report books and in combination with the interview responses chose those who were low achievers, particularly those who had failed to get an average examination score of 50% in six or seven of their eight term reports²¹.

In a previous study (Laurent, 2008) I had focused exclusively on girls' disengagement. However, in an effort to fully understand the notion of disengagement, I felt it was necessary to sample across gender and teaching groups. Hence, I selected one male and one female from each of the four teaching groups (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Core informants selected from Form Three

| FORM | INFORMANTS | |
|------|------------|--------|
| | Male | Female |
| 3B | Irwin | Olive |
| 3E | Rufus | Trudy |
| 3S | Sam | Velma |
| 3T | Wayne | Petra |

These selected students were asked to attend a meeting where they were briefed about the project, informed about their ethical rights and how the information given would be used. Students were presented with an information booklet about the project as well as consent forms for themselves and their parents, and were given one week to decide whether they wanted to participate in the project (see Appendix 2d). All students agreed to take part in the study with parental approval.

²¹ I only focused on students who started their secondary schooling career at Southall. Each academic year, students are presented with three term reports. At the time of the field work, students had received eight reports from their inception at this school.

4.10.2 Sources of Data

Classroom Observation

During the early stages of research, I was anxious about accessing lessons as some teachers had objected to my presence in their classrooms in the previous phase of research. However, since this was a major source of data for me, I took a bolder approach to initiate rapport with staff. Instead of sending letters out to teachers, I approached them individually to seek their permission for classroom observation. And, in an effort to allay teachers' fears of criticism, I referred to the core informants as the main focus of observation and presented them with a list of potential students that I would be interested in working with. This approach worked as I gained approval from all but three staff members, who all turned out to be from a specific department. I reasoned that the exclusion of this department would not be a major threat to validity as the individuals involved constituted only a small proportion (11.5%) of the Form Three teaching staff. Besides, the subject concerned was an option from the practical block that was taught to half-class sized groups. Since I now had the cooperation of most of the teaching staff, I was able to arrange for more frequent observation across a wider range of lessons. I also arranged to be with a specific teaching group for the entire day and observed each of the four teaching groups consecutively. This structure of classroom observation allowed me to see events as they unfolded within a particular classroom setting and provided opportunities to develop a rapport with students. I also wanted to observe students in out-of-lesson settings and made a conscious decision to spend more time with students rather than teachers. Besides, in view of my insider status, I wanted to decrease the possibility of any threats to validity made possible by disclosing too much information about the project to staff or discussing issues relating to the students with them. I also reflected on the advice given by many writers to 'treat the

familiar as strange' and tried to be attentive to all the details of the particular context, recording both the critical incidents and minor details without being judgmental. Moreover, to this end, I often had to ask myself questions such as 'what am I missing?' and 'how is that different from the UK?'

My role in the field was crucial in maintaining a relationship with individuals and getting to the source of information. I had the choice as to whether or not to take on the teacher role (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:86) but I opted solely for the role of 'researcher'. Thus, although I was introduced by most staff as a teacher at the onset of the research, I presented myself as teacher-turned-researcher. During classroom observations, I tried to refrain from any teaching activities and for most of the fieldwork I was a non-participant observer in this sense. On a few occasions students asked me to explain a concept or solve a problem for them which I couldn't help but do. Doing this allowed me to build a rapport with students and increase their trust. However, the test of my loyalty came one day when I received a directive from the head-teacher to supervise a cover lesson²². I had got a 40-minute notice and I declined to do so straightway. However, since I was in a lesson and was unable to explain my position to the head-teacher in person, I felt obliged to take on the role of 'teacher'. I was told by the staff who delivered the message that 'the students have work set for them and all I had to do is to supervise them'. This made the job sound easy but after being out of teaching for three years, I was not sure how this experience would turn out. However, deep within, I felt that whatever the outcome of the lesson, I was not going to enjoy it. This was because I had been observing that particular teaching group for the whole day as a researcher, and yet in the last period I had to take on the role of teacher in their Mathematics class. Ordinarily, this would not have been a problem as I had already

²² This refers to supervising a class in the absence of the teacher.

taught secondary level Mathematics. I was more concerned at this stage about the shift in my role and how I would be regarded by students.

At the beginning of the lesson, as I stood up to address the students, I sensed a change in my behaviour: the 'no nonsense' authoritarian persona that I had been accused of presenting by some teachers and students in the past took over. I demanded that students return to their assigned seats. Some students hesitated before changing seats and others wanted to remain in their current seats but I was having none of this behaviour. I even threatened to report those who did not comply with my instructions to the head teacher. I saw to it that students did the prescribed work with the minimum of noise or distraction. However, towards the end of the lesson, I was relieved of this duty by the head teacher who came in to address the class about an incident that had happened the day before. Having taken on the role of 'teacher' I knew that I had damaged my relations with this group of students. Students were clearly not pleased with my actions and at the end of the lesson some of them complained that I was too harsh with them. They could not understand why I had acted in this way because it was at odds with my behaviour as a researcher.

Students at Southall were accustomed to seeing me as researcher and my shift in role had undesirable consequences for my research. Although I had performed the teacher role effectively, I had jeopardised my relationship with some of the students and I knew that I had to seek ways to mend my relations with this class. Since students remained in one classroom for most of their lessons, I spent the days ahead interacting with them. I also engaged in 'small talk' with various students within the class especially during their break and lunch time. Within a week and half it seemed that the students had re-accepted me as a 'researcher' or

so I hoped. It was then that I really began to appreciate my role as a researcher. Although I had been put in an impossible position, I gave up all remote ideas of taking up another role that invested my relation with students with any kind of authority (Ball, 2003:42). For the rest of my field work, I declined any further offers to take on the role of 'teacher'. I was content to be among the students.

Participation Observation outside of Lessons

Spending time with the students and informants outside of lessons was essential in developing and maintaining trusting relations with them. In this researcher role, I was able to observe aspects of students' behaviour beyond their classroom actions. I soon learnt that gaining information meant being accommodating: turning a blind eye and ignoring deviant acts while showing care by inquiring about their welfare. I soon found myself sitting among students during extra-curricular activities and school events, listening to their stories and comments while adopting a neutral stance, and even sharing in their afterschool life of collecting and eating fruits. It appeared that they were finally beginning to see me as someone who could be trusted. Yet, I was careful not to become involved with students and ensure that I monitored my behaviour at all times.

Student Conversations

It seemed to me that the best part of the fieldwork, and a significant source of data, was students' everyday conversations. These provided vital background data and research insights. However, it was on the ride that I gave students to their homes (during home visits) that much was accomplished. We were unencumbered by the tape recorders or field notebooks and the language barrier was removed. I

was the main research tool, listening intently. I was held in a complex dialogue of engaging the participant and being engaged in what was sometimes an intense encounter. I was locked into the exchange of experiences – the actual experience as lived by the student and the recollected memories of my experiences lived as a child. I found that this information was easy to recall and was more productive than interviews with the students. As I later learnt from participants, these precious moments meant a lot to them as well, as power relations were broken down, and as one participant recalled 'we spoke like we had known each other for years'. This may very well have been the case as in some ways we had become united by nationality and home background.

Student Interviews

Once again, I faced difficulty in obtaining a room to hold the interviews. In this light, during the early stages of this phase of field work, I took a tour around the school and made inquiries about rooms that seemed vacant at the time of observation. It was then that I stumbled upon a locked room. Upon enquiries, I learnt that it served as an office for the Physical Education (PE) staff but it was hardly used. I discussed my interview predicament with the head of PE, who granted me permission to use the room and even made the key available to me. The room turned out to be very dusty but at least it had a desk and two usable chairs which would facilitate the conduct of the interviews. Moreover, since I had access to the keys of the office, I would be able to keep the door closed during the conduct of the interviews, giving some sense of confidentiality. Nonetheless, the office was adjacent to a noisy classroom and this had some effect on the conduct of the interviews.

The lesson observation had been scheduled to allow me equal access to all four of the Form three classes on a daily basis. By contrast, the students' interviews were more sporadic and access to specific students was more difficult. This was because teachers were preoccupied with testing students or preparing them for their end of year examinations, and were therefore reluctant to release students for the interview. In this regard, I had to be alert to occasions when students could be made available to be interviewed. Through unsolicited overhead conversations from staff and students, I found out which teachers were absent, when students had a free period and what activities students would be doing in their lessons. Such information proved to be useful as it enabled me to seize opportunities to interview the eight core informants, whether or not I was shadowing their class at the time. The interviews conducted in the previous research phase had been semi-structured and the respondents' answers were rather abrupt. However, I found out that when I engaged students in a normal conversation they were relatively more open in their responses. Therefore, I opted to use unstructured interviews, designed to facilitate the expression of personal views and facts sincerely and accurately (Woods 1986: 65) and allowing for 'more of an open, democratic, two-way informal free-flowing process' (Woods 1986: 67).

Parent Interviews

Interviews with parents began midway through the project. Parents were contacted and interviews were arranged at a time and place that was convenient to them. Six parents were interviewed at their homes and two were interviewed at their workplaces. The journey times to the interview site varied from twenty minutes to one and a half hours depending on my mode of travel. I drove to the home of five core informants, four of whom lived in a rugged or unpaved terrain. In addition, I

took two buses to visit three of the eight parents. Moreover, in three cases, I still had to do an additional 10 minute trek uphill or downhill to get to the parents' home, even losing my footing along the way. Five of the core informants accompanied me on the visit to their parents but I had to find my own way to the other three interview sites.

The role that I adopted during the interview with parents was very significant as it had consequences for the amount and type of information that parents disclosed. Thus, I had to maintain my research self which required adapting to the requirements of the field, constructing an appropriate role in response to the field setting and making myself acceptable to all parties in the field (Ball, 2003b:33, 42). For example, when I scheduled the interview with parents over the phone, I introduced myself as 'teacher-researcher' but during the interview I presented myself as someone who was concerned about their child's welfare and learning at school. Thus, I felt it was necessary to identify with or associate with parents and students in some ways as this would help to facilitate the discussions with them. However, because of my cultural upbringing, this was not a difficult task. For example, I wore flip-flops (slippers) to most interviews, greeted parents in an informal and cheerful way, avoided staring around informants' homes, sat at the nearest available chair and spoke in a casual manner. Some parents described me as a 'down to earth' person and one parent even remarked that 'if I didn't know you were the one coming, I would have thought that the two of you [referring to his child and I] were friends based on the way you are talking'. In addition, my Kweyol communication skills, poor working-class background, parental status and religious beliefs were all common resources that I drew on to develop a rapport with and to be able to converse with parents. For example, parents felt more at ease and spoke freely when I conversed in Kweyol and when they heard about my poor

upbringing. Moreover I showed some level of interest in their stories and experiences which was aided by the fact that I had two teenagers who were in the same age range as their child. The students were given the option of being present at the interview but they all declined. The conversations with the parents were recorded and the length of the discussions ranged from forty-five minutes to two hours. After the initial home visit I was able to hold subsequent conversations with four of the parents.

Surveys

Since it was a bit difficult to interview teachers, I opted to administer a short semi-structured questionnaire instead (see Appendix 3a). I hand-delivered the questionnaire to eighteen teachers to ensure that it was received. The questionnaire sought to elicit information about their professional history and their views on topics such as teaching practices, notions of engagement and disengagement, student behaviour as well as the history of the school. Teachers were given two weeks to complete the questionnaire and I collected them in person. At the end of the fieldwork I had collect thirteen questionnaires which were completed to various degrees.

A sociometric test was administered to all the students in the Form Three year group (see Appendix 5a). This type of questionnaire had been used in some previous ethnographic studies to provide information about friendship choices and thereby background information about social relations among students (e.g. Lacey, 1970; Pollard, 1984). The sociometric test consisted of statements which required students to give positive and negative nominations of their fellows which were elicited as indicators of peer association and social distance. It also required

students to provide nominations for peers who fitted the descriptions in the list of individual attributes given. I handed out and collected the sociometric test in person, receiving a seventy percent response rate.

Written Documents

Whilst in the field, I collected three main types of written document: school documents, personal documents and archival/library materials. In terms of school documents, I made use of students' record cards and report books. These were vital for gaining information about student performance and contact details of parents. I also made use of students' timetables, rules and regulation booklets, school notices, as well as the daily class schedules for normal days and shortened days, including days when there was religious education and assembly.

Students' log books were a type of personal document which the eight core informants were invited to complete as an optional activity (see Appendix 3c). This type of solicited writing was useful as it provided information that would not be so forthcoming in the interview or observation, such as students' feelings about particular lessons or subjects. The eight core informants were presented with log booklets that had guiding questions. They were asked to write out log entries for each lesson they attended during a period of one week or five teaching days. I collected the learning logs at the end of the field work. The learning logs were completed to varying degrees: a few students completed them in full and one student did not complete one at all.

Prior to starting the second phase of fieldwork, I thought about the types of background information I would need to collect. I needed information on the historical development of education in the Caribbean, Commonwealth Caribbean, the OECS or more specifically in St. Lucia. I was also interested in reviewing work done on the topic of discipline or student misbehaviour. Prior to visiting St. Lucia for the second phase of research, I contacted the college libraries and National Archives and requested information on these topics. However, once in St Lucia I found out that the materials at these institutions turned out to be quite sparse. I was a bit disappointed that I had not got the type and amount of background information that I needed and began to think of ways to get further information. However, during my second phase of fieldwork I got an unexpected call from a relative asking whether I was interested in visiting the main library at the university campus in St. Augustine, Trinidad the following afternoon. In view of the limited materials in St. Lucia, I was quite keen to access relevant information in Trinidad. Besides, I had completed my first degree there and knew how to get to the campus. However, initially I declined the offer on the grounds that funding for my fieldwork did not cater for extra site visits, but I accepted the invitation with alacrity when I was told that my flight and accommodation would be taken care of. The flight was booked for the Thursday evening and I was due to return the Sunday afternoon. This trip came at an appropriate time of the week and this meant that I would only be foregoing one day of fieldwork to take a one-day opportunity to get the literature that I wanted even though I was not entirely sure what would be available. This ability to make decisions in conditions of considerable uncertainty has been cited as one of the diverse demanding skills of ethnographer (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:4). At the end of the trip, I returned with some written sources of data which provided background information about the nature and history of education in the Caribbean as well as about the issue of indiscipline in specific Caribbean schools.

At the end of the second phase of fieldwork I felt that I had graduated from being a novice researcher to a more experienced ethnographer. I had managed to collect large amounts of data of various kinds from different sources and hoped that this would allow for triangulation of data that would prove to be beneficial in validating accounts and observations (Woods, 1986:87). I was now seeking to discover relationships and patterns across the whole corpus, with the ultimate aim of describing and explaining forms of student behaviour (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 163). Thus, with all the data collected I left the field to analyse the information.

4.11 Data Analysis

In an important sense, data analysis begins at the start of an ethnographic research and is an ongoing process. Thus, the data analysis did not start at the end of the second phase of research but it was process that I had begun after my first retreat from the field in November, 2009. The initial retreat provided an opportunity to initiate an analysis of the data that I had gathered so far. This represented descriptions of incidents, events, places, behaviour and experiences. I began by transcribing approximately 10 hours of interview data held with teachers, students and parents. Although it was a tedious process, transcribing was a preliminary stage that allowed me to familiarise myself with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Apart from interview transcripts, my data included observation notes, journal recordings and limited number of school documents. At the start of the analysis, I merged all the collected information into a single corpus of data (Charmaz, 2006; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 161).

I began the process of analysis by going through the data with a view to identifying relevant themes. I made use of substantive codes (Stern, 1994:120) to label segments of the data in order to describe what the data was about (Charmaz, 2006: 3, 42). The codes were subsequently related to each other and grouped together to form broader categories. I wrote preliminary notes or memos (Charmaz, 2006:3) which included analytical insights, reflections on the data and any other ideas occurring to me. The analysis sought to go beyond the data to develop the ideas and I wrote further memos which allowed me to find the connections between different codes, to elaborate on, define and describe categories of behaviour. The initial ideas and categories emerging from the preliminary analysis were written up in the form of a report which was discussed with my supervisors.

The feedback received revealed that my analysis was limited in understanding students' disengagement and that I needed to gather more data towards this end. The feedback also pointed to suggestions for improvements of my research, such as the need to focus more on classroom-based observations. Additionally, I required further sources of data that would allow me to gain information about classroom relations as well as home background via the use of a small sample of students. This purposive sample was not used to represent the Form Three student population but as a source to shed light on the notions of disengagement. These recommendations were taken into consideration and incorporated into the second phase of data gathering.

After the second phase of fieldwork I left the field to conduct a more detailed analysis of the data. This process which began immediately after I left the field lasted for a period of well over one year. This was not uncommon as considerable time and effort is often taken up in processing and analysing the data (Hammersley

and Atkinson, 2007:4). I had gathered information from at least ten different sources, including oral accounts, elicited texts and extant written accounts. Data was collected in a range of contexts both within and out of the school and I hoped that this contextual representation had avoided partial coverage of the data (Ball, 2003b:40). I had to merge the data collected in both phases of field work and, as done in the initial analysis, the information from these various sources were treated as a single data corpus. The data now comprised of observations notes, journal recordings, learning logs, interviews recordings and transcripts, questionnaires responses, sociometric data, students' record cards, students report books and other school documents. I was then ready to perform a full data analysis.

In some ways, I loosely followed Charmaz' adapted version of grounded theorising process (2006:11) which was based on Glaser and Strauss (1967) method. Firstly, I looked for ideas and issues that were related to the original research objectives or topic that were emerging in the data. I used substantive codes to make sense of the data corpus and I sought to make the codes fit the data rather than the data fit the codes (Charmaz, 1994: 98). Thus, the emerging themes were grounded in the data and were not predetermined codes built into the data collection process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3). The coding process proved to be useful as it allowed me to grapple with participants' behaviours (Charmaz, 2006:46). Moreover, studying the data enabled me to learn nuance in students' use of the local language well as their interpretations and meaning (ibid: 34).

Through focused coding (Charmaz, 1994: 102-106) I examined the identified codes and grouped similar codes in a conceptual category (Charmaz, 2006:12; Stern, 1994: 120). I compared the categories to see if there were any connections between them. Moreover, through a method of constant comparison, I examined the

coded data in light of its relationship to a particular category and compared it with other data in the same category or other categories. In so doing, I was able to develop new categories (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 161). Besides, I clarified and refined existing categories by examining all the data that these categories captured as well as variations from it. I also assigned particular items of data to those categories or reassigned the data among categories (Charmaz, 1994: 103; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 161). Where necessary, I submerged existing categories into more general ones through a process of reduction (Stern, 1994: 121) and I also developed subcategories to help explicate the general categories (Charmaz, 1994:103). This process therefore allowed me to search for patterns of behaviour as well as inconsistencies, or contradictions and how these could be explained (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:161). The constant comparison process was facilitated by the use of memos. These memos served as means of describing or clarifying the categories; integrating ideas, concepts and explanations the phenomena to which the categories referred and thereby expanding on the analysis (Charmaz, 1994:108). Thus, I was able to move beyond mere descriptive codes to develop my ideas to an analytical level (Charmaz, 2006:11).

I used the existing literature and performed a new literature search to help expand on the analysis (Charmaz, 1994:104). For example, I carefully scrutinised the disengagement literature and compared relevant categories to concepts, ideas and explanations obtained from the literature. Moreover, I used concepts from the wider symbolic interactionist literature as a theoretical framework to make sense of the data. In this way I sought ways to explain the complexity of students' disengagement. Through theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006:63) I was able to integrate conceptual categories to provide an analytical account which would help to make sense of students' actions and shared meanings. As such, I was able to

develop some models and typologies to help understand conceptual categories including models of the dimensions and patterns of students' disengagement. Additionally, I sought for explanations of the variations in students' meanings and actions as well as deviations from these behaviours. Nevertheless, the process of analysis was not a linear process and I found myself constantly going back and forth between data and ideas (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:161). Although I was sometimes frustrated at the number of times I had to return to the data and literature and the consequent drafts that I had to produce, the process of constant comparison was beneficial in that it allowed me to make sense of the data and thereby helped me to arrive at plausible explanations for students' disengagement.

In organising the analysis, I expanded the conceptual categories and analytical memos to form a coherent report using examples from the data corpus to elaborate on the analytical points that I developed (Stern, 1994:125). Additionally, I drew on a range of symbolic interactionist concepts as a resource to inform specific arguments, (Charmaz, 2006:168). My writing now revealed how I ordered and integrated my ideas (Charmaz, 2006:159) to provide readers with an account of the complexity of student disengagement.

4.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a rationale for the use of ethnography as a research methodology for exploring the nature of students' disengagement. I have also described my methods of data collection including an examination of the research context in St. Lucia, which provided an important background against

which the research process could be understood from conception through to its final stages. Having finally described my methods of data analysis, I will proceed with the research process by presenting an account of my research findings. As such, I will begin with a description of patterns of students' disengagement which is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: PATTERNS OF STUDENT DISENGAGEMENT

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, I presented a review of the literature on engagement and disengagement within both the psychological and sociological traditions. In particular, it was noted that disengagement has been interpreted in a wide variety of ways within psychology, often using other terms such as 'alienation' and 'disaffection' (Fredricks et al., 2004 Libbey, 2004; Skinner et al., 2009), and has usually been treated by sociologists in terms of 'deviance' or 'resistance'. It was noted that there seemed to be little consensus on current definitions and interpretations, and that there was no satisfactory framework for understanding disengagement in the classroom. Moreover, from an interactionist point of view, what is required is one that allows for the context variability of students' behaviour. Otherwise, the diverse and subtle ways in which disengagement may be manifested at school will be overlooked.

In an attempt to address this deficiency, I proposed a re-conceptualisation of students' disengagement by drawing on Goffman's work on 'the interaction order'. I re-conceptualised disengagement in terms of a partial or total withdrawal of attention from the main lesson as it is unfolding for a short or sustained period, perhaps with concurrent engagement in acts that contravene the lesson, classroom or school rules. Moreover, in an effort to describe various subtypes of disengagement, I utilised two dimensions of variation. The first ranged from quiet to loud disengagement, the second from non-disruptive to disruptive disengagement.

Although these two dimensions cross-cut, they indicate different forms that disengagement can take.

In this chapter I will use the framework I have developed to examine patterns of student disengagement in the school I studied namely, Southall Secondary School. Almost all of this disengagement fell into the two categories of quiet and disruptive disengagement. This does not mean that there were not louder forms or non-disruptive forms of disengagement. Rather most of the louder forms turned out to be disruptive and most quiet forms tended to be non-disruptive. Therefore, for the purpose of simplicity I will use these two categories of quiet and disruptive forms of disengagement to organise my discussion.

5.2 Patterns of Disruptive Disengagement

Disruptive disengagement refers to deviant action(s) on the part of students that disrupt the flow of the lesson, or have the potential to do this; thereby causing themselves or others to become disengaged, and prompting the teacher to take some form of action. Indeed, an act is defined as disruptive based on the teacher's definition of the situation (Kyriacou, 1997: 121; Tattum, 1982: 23), as indicated by their taking some form of action against it. Of course, disruptive disengagement can range from minor acts to more challenging behaviour on the part of the student. In the sections that follow I will describe the diverse range of disruptive disengagement that was manifested by the Form Three students at Southall.

5.2.1 Making Noises

One form of disruptive disengagement adopted by Southall students was making noises. This was a common behaviour that was manifested by Eric as illustrated in the following extract:

The lesson has just begun and the teacher is explaining how to solve chemical equations. Eric is sitting to the back of the class and begins to make some grunting noise under his breath; the teacher moves him to the front of the class and continues the explanation

The teacher writes twelve problems on the board to be solved by the students. Students start to work immediately but Eric does not begin the task; he continues to make silly noises and comments. Those around him laugh. The teacher calls on Eric and asks him to focus and do the task

Field notes extracts: Chemistry Lesson

In the above examples, Eric did not remain focused on his class task. However, Eric did not become totally unfocused as he made the noises while he worked. Within Goffman's analysis, Eric would be maintaining some form of minimal involvement in the lesson. However, these low-pitched noises disturbed others and caused the teacher to take certain actions, in these cases, changing his seat and calling on him again to remain focused.

The noises made by Eric can be distinguished from the disruptive noises made by Neville's group (3S)²³. These were students of low ability who generally failed to complete their class tasks and homework and rarely had the necessary books or equipment for lessons. The noises they made took the form of hitting an object, sometimes their desk or their books, with their pens or ruler, presumably out of boredom. On occasion one individual started making this kind of noise, but it

²³ In this chapter, I introduce a set of friends from a specific tutor group using the name of one member of the group followed by the particular class to which the group members belonged. Friendship groups were identified through sociometric tests and confirmed through observations and informal chats with students. See Appendix 5d for a summary of the groups in each of the four Form Three classes.

became contagious, being copied by one or more group members. However, unlike in the case of Eric, it seemed that the noises made by Neville's group were a ploy to get out of the classroom; at least there was delight among the boys when the result was their being sent out of the lesson.

5.2.2 Jokes

When disengaged, some students made jokes among themselves. In particular, this seemed to be a common practice for Michael's group (3B) and was part of the fun that they enjoyed during lessons. They frequently joked around and teased each other, accompanied by giggling, while they worked, but sometimes their fun got out of control and loud laughter erupted, amounting to disengagement. And it was a disruptive form of disengagement since quite often the teacher had to call on the boys to refocus or get back on task. Sometimes the boys were punished by being made to stand in class or near the classroom door until they had settled down. However, the boys did not joke around in all lessons, notably they did not do so where the teachers were stricter or where they found a subject interesting. Here, they were able to focus on their work and work hard at their task. Moreover, the members of Michael's group were of average to high ability, and always had their books and equipment in preparation for each lesson. In this regard, the Social Studies teacher reasoned that 'these boys are not bad kids or rude per se but just too talkative; that is what keeps them back in their work'. In this case, the boys maintained some form of engagement in the main situated activity, the jokes being a subordinate side involvement that sometimes developed into disruptive disengagement.

A different sort of joking took place among Esther's group (3S), as illustrated below:

When the lesson is boring I just try to be quiet and try to listen; sometimes my friends give jokes for it not to be boring... Well I laugh; the teacher will just say keep quiet and sometimes the children continue

Student interview extract

Here, the students did not tease each other but simply told jokes as a way to ease the boredom of the lesson. As in the case of Michael's group, making jokes was a form of disruptive disengagement as the jokes were accompanied by laughter which interrupted the flow of the lesson and caused the teacher to intervene. In the absence of these jokes, at least in Esther's case, she was able to maintain some degree of focus on the main lesson by trying to be 'quiet and listen'.

Jokes of these sorts were also made by the students in Ben's group (3T). However, their jokes were told to anyone within hearing distance and not necessarily directed at group members. Moreover, telling jokes seemed to function as one of many ways of avoiding the written task. Telling jokes as a means of escaping school work resonates with Woods' (1983) notion of 'work avoidance', as one of four types of negotiation by students over school work. Here, they do not reach a negotiated compromise with teachers and their commitment to work is eroded (p. 133). Thus, Ben's group usually sat in most of their lessons with no books or equipment. Besides they often grouped themselves together to engage in off-task activities to pass away the time during lessons, and it could be said that they had an alternative focus, with the main lesson being a subsidiary encounter. In any event, their jokes disrupted the lesson and, at times, they were reprimanded for their lack of work or disruptiveness and were asked to return to their assigned seats.

5.2.3 Loud Talking

Another manifestation of disruptive disengagement was through loud talking which was one way in which particular friendship groups socialised. This is illustrated by the case of Bertha's group (3S), for whom this was a common practice. The girls chatted loudly during lessons and although they displayed a positive attitude to school, and generally had their books and equipment for lessons, they were not always attentive, and chose when they wanted to work. They talked in most of their lessons, and did not seem too perturbed by the threat of punishment from a few of their teachers. Thus, the girls were either fully focused or partially focused on the activity of talking, with the lesson sometimes becoming a subsidiary encounter for them.

This general attitude and behaviour resonates with those of the 'Black girls' in Fuller's (1980) study in a London Comprehensive School. Although these girls saw school in instrumental terms, and were high aspirers and achievers, their classroom behaviours were at odds with this pro-education orientation. Although they abstained from behaviours that would bring them into serious conflict with their teachers they 'openly engaged' in deviant acts such as reading non-lesson relevant material and chatting. However, the behaviour of Fuller's 'Black girls' differed from those of Bertha's group in two respects. Firstly, unlike Bertha's group, where the chatting often took precedence in the lessons, Fuller's girls were only partially unfocused, so that they were able to answer questions posed by their teachers. Secondly, these girls did not challenge their teachers' authority in the way that Bertha's group sometimes did.

The loud talking by Bertha's group was challenged by teachers, and whether the students rejoined the main lesson depended on the manner in which they were spoken to. Thus, if they were upset by their teachers when reprimanded they did little work or refused to work altogether. This response parallels that the reaction of students described in previous symbolic interactionist studies (e.g. Marsh et al., 1978; Tattum, 1982 and Werthman, 1963). The students in these studies resented teachers who spoke to them as if they were small children, shouted at them, were impolite to them or treated them with little or no respect.

The loud talking by Bertha's group was a form of disruptive behaviour that was also engaged in by other groups of students but with some differences in the students' responses to teacher intervention. For example, Michael's group, who were high achievers, sometimes talked loudly about non-school related matters while they worked, but they generally responded positively to the teachers' reprimands. By contrast, the low achieving students in Ben's and Neville's groups who spoke loudly in lesson, like those in Bertha's group, sometimes became confrontational when sanctioned or chastised.

5.2.4 Quarrels

Quarrels among students which occurred during lessons were in most cases forms of disruptive disengagement. The following extract provides an example of a quarrel between Bertram and Frank (both members of 3E) that led to minor disruption in the lesson:

As I enter the class I hear quarrelling in the class, Bertram and Frank are arguing about an incident which took place the previous day involving a group of girls from another school. Frank comes up to me to explain the situation. He tells his side of the story but I said that I am unable to provide any comments. A few minutes later the teacher walks into the class

to begin the lesson. The boys stop the quarrelling and go to their seat. The lesson proceeds for the first ten minutes with the teacher talking about the topic of Happiness. Just then Bertram and Frank, who sit one behind the other, begin another altercation. The teacher stops the lesson and waits for the boys to stop. One student calls on Frank and asks him to stop talking as the teacher is waiting for them to be quiet.

Field notes extract

Clearly, when the quarrel erupts the boys have totally withdrawn their attention from the main lesson and have established an alternative focus. Moreover, their quarrel has disrupted the flow of the lesson and caused them and their peers to be off-task for a short period of time. Bertram and Frank were both members of a class that were involved in frequent conflicts, and both boys had found themselves in quarrels with other class members as well. The conflicts did not always centre on relations with girls but included a diverse range of issues such as conduct of students in the class, theft and jealousy. Most of these minor quarrels ended with the class teacher's intervention, though the issues often surfaced again during recess or lunch times.

These minor quarrels can be contrasted with the major ones that occurred at Southall that resulted in sustained disruptions to lessons and the use of more severe sanctions. These were usually collective acts engaged in by groups of students. Of particular interest here are two groups of female students in Form 3S who were rivals. The first of these groups, Alvina's group, was a somewhat reserved close-knit set of friends, who kept mostly to themselves and mainly interacted with each other. Alvina distinguished her group as follows:

...our little group, the five of us, we walk and lime²⁴ together, we're not vicious and hypocrite like some others and there are others we just don't interfere with; we not quiet but know when to talk. All the children on the other side by the window, they think they too high class²⁵, like we lower than them, that's how they behave, these girls...

Student interview extract

²⁴ Hanging out

²⁵ Higher standard, better off or more important

'These girls' referred to by Alvina were the members of Bertha's group, who stood in contrast to their group. The girls in Bertha's group generally displayed a positive attitude to school, being well dressed and generally having their books and equipment for lessons. However, they sometimes gave the impression that they were 'rough and tough', as I noted earlier chatting loudly during lessons and choosing when they wanted to work. They made enemies of others in the class; and, in particular, some of them disapproved of Alvina's group as they felt that these students were treated favourably by teachers.

In view of their differences, the students from these two groups were often involved in clashes. While, much of the time, these were kept under control, at times heated arguments occurred. The following journal extract illustrates an example of a quarrel between these two groups, amount to a form of disruptive disengagement:

Today I shadowed the students from 3S and it was a very quiet day. There were only twelve students present out of a class of approximately thirty five. When I enquired about the other classmates, I learnt that some of these students were suspended due to an altercation that had occurred between two rival groups in one of their lessons the previous day. I was informed that the quarrel between the two groups had started with a remark made by a member of one group which was taken as an insult directed at the other group. I understood that the quarrels were laced with insults as each group exchanged derogative remarks about each other. As the quarrel developed, other students from the class who were not members of either group became involved. The principal had to be sent for and all the students who were involved were sanctioned. The members of the two groups were suspended for two days beginning today. They would return to school on Tuesday as Monday May 24th was Whit Monday, a holiday. The other students who had drawn themselves into the argument were assigned to hard labour on the school compounds. As such, they were given the task of picking up garbage around the school compound today. Fortunately, both my core informants were not involved and were present to relate the incident to me. Somehow, I knew this argument was imminent but did not anticipate that it would have resulted in suspension. I always sensed the tension in the class between the two groups every time I entered the room and this has been my observation since my early days in the field in October, 2009.

Field notes extract

This type of quarrel undermined the main lesson as other members of the class also withdrew their attention from the main lesson. In essence, the lesson had been replaced by a highly focused alternate activity. Encounters like these were highly

disruptive as the excitement of the activity, as well as teachers' attention to sanctioning procedures, made it difficult for students to resume focus on the main lesson. Goffman used the notion of 'drift' to capture this movement or shift from the main situated activity resulting in collusion against the gathering at large (1963:175-176).

5.2.5 Comments/Remarks

Another type of disruptive disengagement was comments/remarks directed at specific students. This type of behaviour can be differentiated from loud talking in that while loud talking amounted to chatting among friends, comments/remarks served to tease or ridicule others who were often not friends with the offender(s). An example is provided by the case of Eric:

One student makes an inaudible comment to Eric. He responds in Creole 'Shut your mouth'. The teacher speaks to Eric: 'Eric, you will be in Form Four in the next couple of months and you need to settle down'. A student at the back of the classroom begins to laugh. Eric turns to him and says: 'Oi, you have the smell of fowl shit'. The teacher ignores Eric this time and walks away.

Field notes extract: Chemistry Lesson

Here, comments to and by Eric caused others to direct their attention to him, consequently attracting the attention of the teacher. Although students were distracted only momentarily, Eric's comments had the potential to cause widespread laughter, thereby becoming more disruptive. However, Eric's comments did not always cause laughter and other comments made were not well received by his classmates as the following extract shows:

Eric turns around and asks Monique to lend him her calculator. She refuses: 'No, I am using it now, I need it'. Eric responds by teasing Monique about her name and her weight: 'your name is Mg- magnesium and you weighing 158 lbs. Monique, glares at Eric and without a word, continues with her work. The teacher hearing this calls on Eric: 'Eric focus!'

Field notes extract: Chemistry Lesson

Here, Eric's comments take another form, that of teasing directed at another chubby student. Although Monique did not respond, Eric's teasing is a form of deviance, contravening one of the rules of the classroom, that of respect towards others; and also indicates that he is not focused on the task at hand. As with his other comments, Eric's teasing had the potential to disrupt the lesson, for example if other students had begun to laugh or if Monique had decided to retaliate. In these cases, their attention would be drawn away from the main lesson towards the teasing incident. In this case, despite non-reaction on the part of class members, the teacher felt it necessary to intervene to get Eric back on task. Interestingly enough, the teacher does not reprimand Eric for his lack of respect to Monique or for the demeaning comments that he made to other students. Here, she is more concerned with getting the class task done.

Comments made towards other students in the classroom could, of course, result in major provocation of classmates. This is demonstrated by the following extract from one teacher's emailed questionnaire response. The HOY reported that 'Petra had been teased and retaliated miserably'. By this she meant that Petra reacted in a violent way when provoked by others. In this regard, the HOY explained that:

Petra's father is a drug addict. A few boys who know her background taunt her about her father and make a mockery out of her situation. She protects herself by being extremely aggressive and engages in quarrels laced with insults. She lets out outbursts and can't seem to control herself. She becomes extremely angry and agitated and is oblivious to the presence of authoritative figure in the classroom during this time. It takes a lot of restraint on her part to avoid fighting but it has been a close call many times.

Teacher questionnaire response extract

Thus, Petra became quite upset and aggressive when ridiculed and tended to react negatively much to the annoyance of her classmates. Petra explained that 'the rage does take me anywhere and with anybody; I not sure why I get into a rage but it

sometime happens when others provoke me'. I later learnt from unsolicited chats with students and staff that the 'few boys' referred to were members of Ben's group, who were highly critical of their classmates especially the girls and always sought ways to taunt them, much to their annoyance. In this regard, the teasing done by the members of Ben's group caused the victim to become unfocused on the lesson and to retaliate in disruptive ways. Consequently, this caused others to withdraw attention from the lesson completely to focus on the incident at hand. Teachers' responses to this type of disruptive behaviour often included more than just reprimands, occasionally involving measures such as written warning to parents and detention.

5.2.6 Calling Out

This category of disruptive disengagement describes different ways in which students attracted the attention of others who were some distance away from the caller and this sometimes included the teacher. This type of behaviour differs from the loud talking which was done among classmates who were often in close proximity to each other. Besides, calling out is different from comments/remarks in that the later behaviour was not necessarily loud, sometimes made under the breath and often served as a means of provocation or teasing.

An example of 'calling out' was practised by Neville's group (3S). These boys sought opportunities to disrupt the lesson by shouting to their friends across the classroom or to their peers who passed by through the flowered blocks or louvered windows in the corridors. They did this to pass on some sort of message or information, to request an item, or as it appeared to me sometimes just to make

them aware of their presence. This sort of calling out functioned outside of the official lesson agenda as the parties involved became unfocused on the lesson in an effort to engage in an alternate encounter. Besides, their calling out was not an acceptable classroom behaviour as it contravened the school's rules and regulations. Thus, in response to their behaviour, Neville's group was either chastised or sent out of the lesson.

Calling out to passers-by was also a behaviour manifested by Eric on a few occasions. However, these individuals were usually not his friends and he called out to them so as to direct some comment at them as exemplified below:

Eric shouts out to a student who is approaching the classroom door: 'Ai girl, that boy says he like to see you'. One student, Claudia, begins to laugh. Eric turns to her 'What you laughing at Claudia?' The teacher hears Eric and moves across to stand next to him.

Field notes extract: Chemistry lesson

This kind of calling out differs from that of Neville's group as they were remarks designed to cause others to laugh. Here again, though, these deviant acts were in breach of school rules and had the potential to cause others to be distracted from the lesson. Interestingly, Eric was not always reprimanded for these actions. One possible reason might be that he was a high aspirer who made the comments while he worked.

Another example of calling out is provided by the following incident:

The students are having French lesson. The teacher calls the class to attention. Some students have ignored the teacher. Bertram speaks up: Miss you not seeing those that are out of their seats, and eating. Sean looks at Bertram as he is one of those who are out of their seats. Bertram continues to call out to the teacher: 'Miss, tell them to go back to their seat, they not working just chatting'. Some students near Bertram begin to argue with him; the teacher stops the lesson and tries to bring the class to order. She also reprimands Bertram for shouting out.

Field notes extract: French lesson

This type of calling out is interesting because, in Goffman's terms, Bertram would be operating within the official agenda, and we would have to accept that he is focused on the lesson. As a matter of fact, he is drawing the teacher's attention to the fact that some of his classmates are not focused on the lesson. However, his calling out is still a manifestation of disruptive disengagement on two counts. Firstly, Bertram's behaviour is unacceptable in that he should not be shouting out during the lesson; this is a form of deviance from the student role. Secondly, Bertram's action has caused others to become unfocused on the lesson and engage in an argument with him. They may have argued with him either because he was being a snitch or because they were distracted by his calling out. Either way, his (perhaps well-intentioned) calling out disrupted the flow of the lesson causing the teacher to admonish him for his actions.

5.2.7 Questioning the Teacher

In this category of disruptive disengagement, the students ask the teacher questions to further their own ends. While this behaviour is similar to Bertram's calling out in that it also operates within the official lesson agenda, it differs in that there is an implicit motive of subverting the activity or even challenging the role of the teacher. The following extract illustrates this form of behaviour.

A Biology test is taking place and the students are being supervised by a Cover staff; one student begins fidgeting with some device under the desk and the teacher goes to the student to make some enquires. Eric then questions the teacher: 'Miss why you walking around the class like that? You disturbing us'. Some students laugh at this remark. The teacher looks at Eric for a moment without a word, ignores the question and tries to sort out the fidgeting issue.

Field notes extract: Biology Lesson

We see here that Eric is treating the teacher as in an equal position to himself, expecting her to adhere to the same examination rule he is being required to follow,

that of not disturbing others. In this way he is questioning the teacher's authority. However, the question that Eric asks was also a rhetorical one which was intended for a given effect: that of bringing out laughter in the other students. In any event, Eric's behaviour is a form of deviance as he is taking on a role that is not his, and in so doing he is contravening both the general rules of classroom conduct as well as the specific examination rules. His behaviour is a disruptive form of disengagement as he has prevented some students from concentrating on the examination. It is interesting to note that the teacher has not said a word to Eric. However, her responsive look carries both a message of reprimand as well as symbolises her adherence to the 'rule of silence' to be observed during an examination.

Another form of questioning aimed at the teacher, which took place within an ordinary lesson, was used by Ben's group. However, unlike the case of Eric, the questions from Ben's group did not seem to have been intended to undermine the authority of the teacher. Instead, the aim seems to have been to prolong the conversations as long as possible so as to avoid any written class task:

The students are having an 80-minute lesson on the topic of Groups. The teacher explains that in the first twenty minutes they will conclude the topic on types of groups and then the class will be given an assessed class task to do.

| | |
|----------|---|
| Ben: | Miss, do we have to do the work now? |
| Teacher: | I said after I am finished with the topic. (Teacher explains the peer group as a type of group and relates a story to show the negative influence of peer groups) |
| Shem: | Miss let me tell you a joke. (He does not wait for an answer from the teacher and relates a joke which to me turns out to be racist). Teacher explains 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' and asks for examples from the class |
| Ben: | Miss you know about the two gangs fighting in Jamaica? |
| Teacher: | Yes I've heard. (Ben goes on to talk about the gangs and teacher does not object) |
| Teacher: | Can I have the examples of the in-groups and out-groups please? Shem smiles at Ben and raises his hand |
| Shem: | Miss, hear this eh! (He proceeds to give another joke unrelated to the topic. Some students laugh. Ben turns to Roger and gives a joke among themselves to which they burst out laughing) |
| Teacher: | Okay, Let's move on please. Carl, give us an example of in-group. (Carl does not get to answer as Ben speaks up). |
| Ben: | Miss, have you seen the YouTube video about the two lesbians doing nastiness to themselves, like they excreting |

Teacher: I have heard about it, they're defecating?
 Ben proceeds to provide further information about the video. Some commotion; a few students look frustrated; others say that they do not want to know about that and ask the teacher to move on. Ben still gives a few details.
 The teacher interjects and makes the comment that this behaviour is ungodly [referring to that of the lesbians]. Ben reaches into his bag takes out a rosary and approaches Anya. He says she is afraid of it and therefore needs it to ward off evil

Teacher: Leave Anya alone, Ben. We will take two more examples.

Carl: What about the Goth Miss, it is a religious group that practices evil so it is an in-group.
 The discussion shifts to religion as the teacher talks briefly about the importance of having God in their lives.

Ben: Miss, you see the movie called 'The Craft' already?
 One student grumbles; two girls have put away their books; Carl puts away his Social Studies [SS] book and takes out his English book; Wayne rests his head down on the table

Ben: (looks around the class) Miss, some students have not heard about it, tell us again.

The lesson continues in this vein until the bell goes. The students did not get the opportunity to do the class task and are given the exercise to do as homework. Kym voices her disappointment that they did not get to do the exercise but Ben and Shem look at her and begin to laugh.

Field notes extract: SS lesson

Within a Goffmanian perspective, the boys may be said to be operating within the focused gathering and may be said to be engaged in the main lesson as it is unfolding. However, when the intent and effect of the act is examined, their behaviour can be seen as disruptive: they have caused a shift in the direction of the lesson, and prevented achievement of the lesson objectives. Moreover, the boys' action has disrupted the learning of others and has left little time for the class exercise, much to the frustration and annoyance of some of the students. The boys used the discussions to their own advantage and their efforts at work avoidance were rewarded with smiles and laughter from some of their classmates. Yet, the teacher responded by accommodating the questions of these boys instead of reprimanding them. It can therefore be argued that both teachers and the boys have engaged in what Woods called 'closed negotiation', where 'each party acts independently of the other and comes to terms with themselves on the conditions under which they will meet the other's expectation' (1983:149). In this regard, the teacher and the boys have attributed different meanings to the lesson (p. 148) as they both try to maximize their interests. In this case, the teacher saw the boy's

questioning as active participation. Therefore, she worked at getting them to remain involved in the lesson thereby maintaining order in the class. On the other hand, the boys perceived their questioning as a means of prolonging the discussion phase of the lesson so as to delay the written work, which they succeeded in doing. In this case, the boys' behaviour can be seen as a form of 'sabotage' (Turner, 1983) as it distracted attention from the intended topic and sidetracked the teacher into irrelevant topics.

5.3 Patterns of Quiet Disengagement

Quiet disengagement refers to those forms of non-disruptive deviant behaviour that involve little or no sound or noise. Thus, this includes both covert actions invisible to the teacher as well as physical and mental actions that students engage in during their lessons. These forms of quiet disengagement are described in the following sections.

5.3.1 Resting

One form of quiet disengagement which was frequently adopted by the Form Three students at Southall was resting their heads on the desks. For example, Alvina reported that 'I resting my head on the desk and ignoring her [French teacher]; sometimes she says sit up but I does still rest my head' Similarly, Loren noted that 'well I just sit down there I doesn't even write down notes, I just sit down there; especially when Maths boring I just sit down there when I ready I just lie [my head] on the table and finish with that'. Likewise Rufus reported that 'I find it difficult

to work in the afternoons especially if the class is boring; I rest my head on the table...'. From these examples it can be seen that although these students did no class tasks, they were in a sense only partially unfocused on the lesson as they were still able to listen to or hear what was happening in the lesson. However, it was possible for resting to become totally unfocused if it was accompanied by the engagement in other activities as illustrated in the following extract:

The Spanish lesson has begun. The teacher has asked the students to complete two exercises from their text books to be handed in at the end of the lesson. Ben does not take out his exercise books or pen to do the class task. Instead he rests his head on the desk. The teacher approaches him and asks him to get the work done but Ben tells the teacher that he is feeling ill. He continues to rest his head on the desk. Later, one of his friends, Kyle is sent out of the class for his insolence to the teacher. He stands at the door in clear view of Ben. Ben keeps resting his head while checking to see if the teacher is looking in his direction. He then laughs at Kyle and makes comments to him. This goes on for the duration of the lesson. At the end of the lesson, Ben goes out for recess with his friends, running about and laughing. I call on him to ask if he was feeling better and whether he had a problem with his hand. He informed me that he had no problems with his hand but that he had a problem with his back. I spent the next period with his class group who is having an Art lesson. In this lesson, Ben has taken out his sketch pad and is completing his block lettering like the rest of the students.

Field notes extract: Spanish lesson

In this example, although Ben is resting he is also engaging in an alternative encounter with his friend Kyle, and as such he is totally unfocused on the lesson. Moreover, Ben had used the excuse of being ill as a means of seeking an opportunity to rest and thereby opting out of the class task. Clearly he used the opportunity to rest as a work avoidance strategy in the Spanish lesson as he worked without any difficulty in the next lesson. This tendency to employ medical excuses so as to avoid participating in the lesson was also practiced by other students. In this regard, Trudy explained that 'sometimes the children fake headaches or belly aches'. Likewise, Olive noted that 'for Maths, the children fake headaches and bellyaches'. Moreover, I had also seen this practice used successfully by particular students to gain their teacher's permission not only to rest but to leave the classroom as well.

5.3.2 Mental Withdrawal

Mental withdrawal includes specific forms of disengagement where the students are physically present but unable or unwilling to maintain mental focus on the lesson for a short or for a sustained period of time. Goffman (1963) called these kinds of 'emigration from the gathering' 'away' and saw these behaviours as a form of side involvement. Moreover, he argued that they mask disengagement (1963: 58). As he puts it:

While outwardly participating in an activity within a social situation an individual can allow his attention to turn from what he and everyone else considers the real world and gives himself up for a time to a world in which he alones participates.

(Goffman, 1963: 69)

In Schutz's terms (1945) this amounts to shifting to a different 'finite province of meaning', with its own peculiar multi-dimensional cognitive style (p. 552). This involves exiting the current reality of everyday life. And it took a variety of forms: sleeping, daydreaming or engaging in deep thought and staring around aimlessly. For example, some students documented their proclivity to sleep in lessons as evidenced from the following log extracts:

Velma:

The lesson went badly cause I hate the teacher and she moving too fast with the work; I was upset and so I slept during the whole of period 8.

Chemistry Period 7-8: 08/06/2010

Wayne:

I slept during the double period; the lesson was too long.

Chemistry Period 2-3: 15/06/2010

Sleeping can be categorised as a totally unfocused activity as the students are unable to maintain attention on the lesson as it is unfolding. Thus, both Wayne and Velma totally withdrew their attention from the lesson either for part or the whole of

it. However, in certain cases, sleeping occurred for more sustained intervals lasting up to two periods (80-minutes long). An example is given in the case of Petra as evidenced from her learning log:

I learnt nothing new but how to sleep more in class. I was really tired and slept the hole 2 periods

English Period 7-8: 10/06/2010

I put my head down on the desk during the lesson and slept. It was a waste of time. I learnt nothing during this lesson. I find this lesson boring

Maths Period 4: 11/06/2010

I slept during my two Maths periods. I think that it is bull sheet. This lesson is nonsense. I learnt how to sleep more in class

Maths Period 1-2: 14/06/2010

Thus, sleeping was a common and noticeable form of disengagement adopted by Petra in certain lessons, particularly in her English and Maths lessons. Such sustained periods of sleeping indicated that Petra had been totally unfocused from the onset of the lesson with the implication that she did not want to participate in the lesson at all. This behaviour is not consistent with the willingness and spontaneous engrossment that necessarily characterises encounters according to Goffman. Moreover, while it might be expected that such sustained inattention would be challenged by the teacher in Petra's case it was not, as shown in the following two extracts below:

In the Maths lesson the teacher enters the class 10 minutes late and provides an explanation for his lateness. Petra is sitting at her desk looking outside of the classroom. She has no equipment or exercise book on her desk. The teacher informs the class that they are doing some revision in preparation for their end of term exams the following week. As soon as the teacher begins speaking, Petra puts her head down on the desk and remains in this position sleeping for the entire lesson. The teacher stands in front on the class next to Petra's desk but has said nothing to Petra all lesson.

The English lesson is about to start. It is a double period. Petra sits at the front of the class looking forward. The teacher instructs the class to complete the Literature exercise from the previous lesson. While the teacher is speaking Petra rests her head on her desk. She does not complete the activity. The teacher circulates around the class but does not bother Petra. Later ... the teacher stands to the side of the class and calls every one to attention. Petra's head is still bent on the desk. The teacher explains a dramatisation activity and asks for

volunteers to play the role of characters from a scene taken from the Literature text. Some students raise their hands to be selected. Petra does not raise her hand or her head. When the performance begins, Petra raises her head briefly to look on but puts back her head on her desk for the rest of the activity.

Field notes extract: Maths and English lesson

In cases like these, it seemed that such open disregard for the lesson by Petra was tolerated and other sources of information indicated that perhaps Petra was allowed to continue this behaviour because she had the potential to be disruptive. For example, the Maths teacher provided the following account of Petra's behaviour:

Nature of problem: - Rudeness, unproductive in terms of work, and she comes to school as it seems every other day.

Description of behaviour: - She does not like to be questioned about her lack of work output or absenteeism. She gives you the stare and tells you to mind your business

Teacher questionnaire response extract

It seems then that as long as the teacher did not make any demands on Petra she was content to sleep in her lesson and where she was forced to work she became disruptive and rude.

This behaviour on the part of Petra and her teachers can be explained in terms of use of the coping strategies (Woods, 1983) adopted by them. Thus, the English and Maths teachers may have adopted what Hargreaves (1978) called a 'confrontation-avoidance' coping strategy. This refers to 'either a refusal to act upon pupil challenges or a minimization of responses to such challenges' (Hargreaves, 1978:147 cited in Woods, 1983:112). Here, the teachers tolerated non-disruptive deviance on Petra's part in order to avoid a more disruptive form of disengagement: direct challenge to their authority in the form of answering back and open cheek (Woods, 1983: 120). In other words, teachers avoided provoking this pupil and causing greater disturbance (p. 112). Moreover, Woods sees the avoidance of confrontation as kind of control that is opposite to negotiated strategies. This is

because no agreement has been reached but simply decisions are made on both sides in what could be a confrontational situation (p. 129).

Another form of mentally withdrawing from lessons is illustrated in the case of Olive in the extract below. She reported that:

If I don't understand something in the class I would stare at the teacher or find something else to do like other class work. When the classes are boring I look down at or write down on my book, stare at the teacher, look around, sometimes I does just watch the children and shake my head.

Like sometimes I does just sit in class, sometimes like, I doesn't focus on what some of the teachers are saying; sometimes I just say like what I will do in life and them kind of things; how I will be and them kind of things; like I want to go to the States, overseas and do something.

Student interview extract

Thus, Olive 'switched-off' when she could not understand what was being taught or when she was unable to suppress thoughts that were not lesson- related. Whereas staring around aimlessly may indicate only a partially unfocused attention 'away' from the lesson since students may still hear what is going on, being in deep thought is a totally unfocused activity, whereby full attention is withdrawn from the lesson.

In a similar way to Olive, Sam was observed to be mentally withdrawn at times as well. It was my observation that during certain lessons, Sam stared forward at his teachers, at the blackboard or at his exercise books and at times, he appeared to be engaged in deep thoughts. Sam explained that:

I try hard on my school work and try to complete the work. I do not feel comfortable asking for help in lessons and prefer to approach the teacher afterwards and sometimes I drift away and find myself thinking about things happening at home.

Student interview extract

Thus, Sam was able to flood in and out of his lesson as other external issues occupied his mind. In a similar way, Rufus' mental withdrawal took the form of daydreaming. As such, he reported that:

I don't always pay attention in class and focus on my work during lessons. I find that I don't work hard on my school work and don't get much work done in the class; I find that I waste more time in lessons after lunch as I often feel tired in the afternoon; I...sometimes daydream

Student interview extract

Thus, daydreaming was a totally unfocused activity that prevented Rufus from engaging in his lessons and completing his class tasks. Moreover, this activity took place during the afternoon when Rufus felt tired. Nevertheless, there is some uncertainty about the frequency or duration of his daydreams. Goffman saw daydreaming/deep thoughts as the most important kind of "away" as it 'constituted an eloquent sign of departure from all public concrete matters within the situation' (1963:70). As such, during daydreaming episodes 'individuals become carried away by a meditative task that they are performing' and either 'relive some past experiences or rehearse some future ones' (ibid).

Some previous writers have identified behaviours that either imply or exemplify the manifestation of mental withdrawal on the part of students; for example, Jonasson's (2011) notion of 'absence in class' implies a demonstration of mental withdrawal in the class. Thus, 'absence in class' was exemplified by students not participating in school-defined activities and instead engaging in a wide range of behaviours including sleeping, taking smoking breaks, sending text messages, leaning head on the table, spending long time in the toilet among others. Jonasson argued that 'absence in class' can be distinguished from 'absence from class', the later behaviour implying a lack of physical presence in the classroom. Similarly, Turner (1983) classification of students' withdrawal included 'switching off'

(staring into space, daydreaming, sleeping), doing another activity (reading, chatting, playing games), withdrawing from the lesson but not from school itself and turning up late to classes (p. 55-57). However, in both cases above, the range of activities described are indicative of forms of mental withdrawal as well as behaviours that I have classified as types of physical withdrawal. One drawback with the use of this wide cluster of behaviours employed by Jonasson and Turner is that it does not provide a clear differentiation of types of disengagement.

5.3.3 Physical Withdrawal

Physical withdrawal refers to a variety of different ways in which students absented themselves from the classroom to avoid engaging with the lesson. This is described by Goffman as a means of 'taking leave' from the focused gathering to engage in an alternative activity. There were several ways in which this could occur: arriving late, leaving during the lesson, leaving early, missing the entire lesson, a whole day of school or not coming to school for days or weeks at a time. It could, of course, be argued that when students are absent from the lesson, they are not necessarily unfocused or disengaged. However, research by Collins (2000; 2006) has shown that the causes of disaffection are similar for pupils who fail to attend school and those who 'play truant in mind', a term borrowed from Young, (1984:12). Collins (2000:210) argues that 'playing truant in mind describes a situation in which a pupil is physically present in the classroom but who for whatever reason does not participate in the experience which has been planned and presented by the teacher'. Thus, students who truant are in some ways similar to those who 'play truant in mind', that is being mentally withdrawn, as both categories of students are withdrawing from the lesson. In this regard, absence from school (where it is not caused by sickness) would indicate a total disengagement from official lessons.

An example of physical withdrawal is seen in the case of Petra who sometimes withdrew from lessons by not turning up to school at all for the day. She had been absent 30 times in the first two terms of Form Three, the highest figure recorded among the eight core informants I studied in depth (see Appendix 6a). She commented that: 'I do not enjoy coming to school all the time and prefer to stay at home sometimes'. Although Petra had a pro-education orientation (Fuller, 1980) she did not always enjoy her experience at school because of relations with her peers. Petra's high absenteeism can be conceptualised as an extreme form of disengagement indicating that she had become emotionally withdrawn from the process of learning. In this case and others, disengagement in lessons can be seen as on a trajectory towards school dropout (Alexander et al., 1997). Moreover, researchers such as Balfanz et al. (2007), Broadhurst et al. (2005), Lessard et al. (2007) and McIntosh & Houghton (2005) have acknowledged school dropout, as predicted from absenteeism or truancy figures, as a possible outcome of student disengagement at secondary school.

Another example of this type of physical withdrawal is the case of Olive, who had been absent eight times during the first two terms of school. She recounted that although she liked being in school most times she felt that she did not belong there and sometimes stayed at home. Additionally, she explained that 'I sometimes stay home when the lessons are boring... the noise that the students make disturbs me; I stay by the lunch table to study but I'd rather stay home to study'. However, contrary to what this implies, when Olive was absent from school she sometimes engaged in other activities. For example, she reported that when at home she took care of her baby brother while her mother went to town, she watched the news on the television or a television channel called 'Nick Jr.'. These behaviours resonate

with Goffman's notion of 'taking leave' from an encounter to engage in other activities.

Apart from being absent from school, there were other situations where students sought 'legitimate' opportunities to leave the classroom, and in Turner's (1983) words here the students could be said to be withdrawing from the lesson but not from school itself. For example, Neville's group volunteered to go on errands for their class teacher and did not return or returned very late, presenting excuses for their tardiness. Sometimes, they volunteered to help other teachers during times that coincided with specific lessons they did not wish to attend. At other times, the boys just didn't turn up to certain lessons but remained elsewhere on the school compound; in a few cases they left their lessons (especially those held outdoors) to pick mangoes. Some teachers were aware of these actions but took no action, while others demanded that the students return with an excuse from the principal for their absence from lesson. In any event, the boys' absence for part of or for an entire lesson meant that they were either partially or completely unfocused on the lesson and could be considered to be manifesting a form of quiet disengagement.

Some commentators have viewed students' withdrawal behaviours as a form of 'retreatism' where students are not committed to the goals or means of the school and have found no alternative goals or means (see Furlong, 1985:78). However, evidence from my findings suggests that students engaged in these activities did often share the values of school, enjoyed being in school and were engaged in certain lessons. This suggests that other factors may account for their withdrawal from lessons, rather than some global adaptation.

5.3.4 Writing Activities

Some students occupied themselves in various types of writing activities as an alternative activity. These were not directly related to the lesson at hand or focused on the lesson as it was unfolding (Collins, 1996:45). The writing activities that the students engaged in can be classified into academic and non-academic writing tasks. An example of an academic writing task was seen in the case of Olive who sometimes spent lessons getting her notes in order. Her view was that:

I do not like to come to school late; because I miss out a lot. When I arrive late sometimes, I cannot get what the teacher is saying, I just sit and be quiet or write up notes that I missed

Student Interview extract

Trudy reported engaging in the same activity:

I try to complete the class work. If I don't understand it I sometimes ask the teacher for help or I find something else to do in the lesson. Sometimes I write the notes that I miss or complete other home work so when I get home I do not have any to do.

Student Interview extract

In these two cases, Olive and Trudy engaged in a structured academic activity which was not part of the official lesson agenda. This activity drew their attention away from the lesson and they therefore became fully unfocused for a short or for a sustained period. It can be argued here that the students are educationally focused because the tasks that they are engaged in are helping to advance them academically. Moreover, the same can be said of other structured writing tasks that students may engage in during lessons, for example where the teacher is seen as incapable of teaching or as moving at too slow or fast a pace. Nevertheless, the students are still disengaged: they are not focussing on the lesson as it is unfolding. From a Goffmanian perspective, there has been a withdrawal from the main encounter's agenda to engage in another situated activity. Furthermore, there is also a lack of commitment to the 'we rationale', since students and teachers are

pursuing different agendas which have not been discussed or agreed upon. Of course, sometimes the writing tasks are not even related to the lesson. Thus, students would be said to be disengaging as they have flooded out of lesson activity and have replaced the class activity with another academic writing task.

This form of disengagement can be contrasted with the borderline case where students are completing a class task during the lesson but being emotionally detached from the task. In the later situation students may be perceived to be paying attention to the dominant encounter which amounts to engagement in the lesson. This is illustrated by the following two log book accounts as documented by Velma:

We had to answer a composition; it was boring; the lesson went well because we were quiet but it was boring

SS Period 3: 07/06/2010

I wrote notes but did not understand it; I was confused but just did it; the lesson was boring.

Maths Period 1-2: 14/06/2010

Here, Velma completed the class work as it is what she was supposed to be doing, even though the writing task was perceived to be uninteresting. However, this behaviour has been recognised by some writers as a form of disengagement. For example, Skinner et al. (2009) saw this action as a form of ritualistic participation where the students go through the motions but are not engaged. Likewise, Nardi and Steward (2003) described this behaviour as one where students 'routinely execute but do not get substantially involved with the task' (p. 346). However, from a Goffmanian perspective the action would be considered as an engaged act despite the lack of emotional involvement and the perceived irrelevance of the task. Based on Goffman's analysis there is a conscious attempt by the individual to suppress the emotional aspect and to carry out the task without withdrawing

attention from the lesson. Hence, as a basic requirement, individuals are obliged to show visible evidence that they sustain a minimal involvement in the main involvement to avoid the appearance of being utterly disengaged (Goffman 1963: 60).

Whereas Olive and Trudy were involved in structured academic activities, other students engaged in non-academic activities. One example of this non-academic activity was seen in the case of Rufus as illustrated in the following field notes extract:

The lesson has just begun and students have been given an exercise to do on report writing. Rufus has his head on the table and has not taken out his book. The teacher calls the class to order. Rufus takes a piece of paper from the desk and begins doodling; he does not look up as the teacher gives instructions on how to complete the report. Ten minutes later, Rufus begins to write/mark on his desk. It does not seem that he has begun writing the report.

Field Notes extract: English lesson

Here, Rufus spent time doodling or scribbling on his book or on his desk, relatively unstructured activities, instead of engaging with or participating in the lesson at hand. Moreover, Rufus failed to engage with the lesson from the onset and it is not clear even whether he was listening to what the teacher was saying. Hence, Rufus has withdrawn his full attention from the lesson to doodle or scribble. Alternatively, his attention may be partially unfocused on the lesson if we assume that he was listening to the teacher. Either way, his doodling or scribbling is a deviant act as it is not what he was required to do at the moment.

Another example of an unrelated writing task which was an occasional form of disengagement was engagement in a more structured kind of drawing. This behaviour is illustrated in the case of Wayne who enjoyed drawing pictures for other students in his class:

The students are required to complete an exercise in their books. Most students do not have access to the text. I look around as the teacher chastises the class for their lack of books. One student near me explains that most students choose to leave their books at home as they do not like the subject. Some students move around to sit near someone with a book and to get on with the task. Others remain in their seats and are chatting. The teacher walks around the class to help those who require assistance. Wayne is in his seat; he has his text book on the desk but it is still closed; he is drawing instead. On further enquiry, another student next to me explained that Wayne was finishing a drawing for him; he noted that Wayne is a very good artist and he had to pay him for the job.

Field notes extract: Spanish lesson

In this example, Wayne has become totally engrossed in the act of drawing and he can be seen to be paying no attention to the official encounter. It can be argued here that Wayne had taken out his textbook, unlike some other students in his class and on the surface this may suggest some form of commitment to learning. However, in the context of the classroom encounter, Wayne would be partially or totally unfocused on the lesson as he is not complying with the teacher's instruction; in other words he is being a deviant. Thus, Wayne's drawing would be seen as the main situated activity with the lesson being a subordinate or replaced activity for him.

An additional non-academic writing practice which constituted a form of disengagement was note writing. Unlike the writing tasks done by the boys, note writing was a more covert, unobtrusive activity which was mainly practiced by girls. This was certainly common for Velma, who spent much of her lessons discreetly writing and passing notes to her girlfriends. In her ethnographic study of girls' friendship, this practice was identified by Hey (1997:50) as an 'important means of transmitting the cultural values of friendship' and that it 'constituted visible evidence of the extensive emotional labour' invested in the friendship. Velma enjoyed the sheer fun of passing these notes around, and her class tasks were interspersed with much note writing. Moreover, it clearly served as a means to while away the time, especially when lessons were boring. It seemed then that note writing was a

sustained activity which was carried out continually throughout the duration of the lesson.

Due to the pre-assigned seating arrangement of the class, Velma did not sit close to her friends. She sat at the end of the front row to the left hand side of the class and her other two correspondents sat in other parts of the classroom, one sitting four desks behind her and the other sitting at the end of the last row on the far right of the class. It may be that Velma adopted this note writing skill to compensate for the sitting distance from her friends during lessons. Velma explained that 'we write about all sorts of things-personal stuff, boys, things that have happened or are going to happen...' Thus, it is possible that Velma's personal life out of school as well as other events occurring in the absence of her friends may have provided a valuable source of information, and thereby a rich and varied content for her notes. The notes were 'intentionally hidden' and this may have suggested that the girls were not challenging the main agenda. However, note writing was a deviant act as it was a non-class related activity that should not be engaged in during lessons. As such, this practice of note writing resulted in a partially unfocused attention on the lesson and clearly demonstrated the girls' ability to focus jointly on two tasks of importance to them. Besides, whether the lesson or the note-writing was the subsidiary activity varied according to the nature of the lesson as well as the subject of the note content.

5.3.5 Quiet Chatting

For the majority of students, engagement in quiet conversation was a common form of disengagement in lessons. I wish to distinguish quiet chatting from

louder talk taking place in the classroom as well as from the mere brief interchange of comments among students about their class task. Chatting necessitated a withdrawal of attention from the main lesson, which would be seen by Goffman as 'flooding out' of the main encounter. Thus, students varied in the extent to which they withdrew their attention from the lesson as it was unfolding. In some cases, chatting can be seen as a side involvement where students engage in conversations with their peers while doing their class tasks. This was sometimes practised by Velma as illustrated below:

I wrote and talked with my friends and listened to the teacher

French Period 1:07/06/2010

I talked and did some work; this lesson is boring because I hate the teacher

Maths Period 2-3:08/06/2010

I talked and wrote; it was boring; it went bad because I hate the teacher

Maths Period 4:11/06/2010

In this form of disengagement, Velma maintained a partially focused attention on the lesson and was said to be engaging in a multiple focused activity. Another example of this multiple focused activity was observed in the case of Alvina's group which consisted of a set of five close-knit friends. As explained earlier, these girls kept mostly to themselves and mainly interacted with each other. During lessons they sat in close proximity to each other and spent most of every lesson chatting very quietly to each other whilst working, which took away from the time spent on class tasks. On some occasions, the girls totally withdrew their attention from the lesson for brief periods as their chat developed into a totally focused activity. However, it seemed that this was hardly noticed by teachers even though the girls occupied the first two rows to the far right of the classroom. It may be that their chatter was ignored or overlooked because their talk did not seriously disrupt the lesson.

On other occasions, students flooded out of the lesson and engaged in sustained conversations with their friends. In this case, students' attention moves completely away from the teacher and the official lesson and chatting becomes a totally focused replacement activity. Examples of this sort of activity have been documented by students as illustrated in the following accounts:

When the lesson is boring I just talk to my friends instead of working

Trudy: Student interview extract

I slept during the double period it was too long. I talked to my friends in the second period. I did no [class] work.

Wayne: Chemistry Period 2-3 15/06/2010

Here, both students have failed to do the required class task, choosing rather to engage in conversations with their peers and hence, they are said to be disengaging from their learning.

Whereas chatting of this sort among certain students can occur during particular lessons, for others, chatting in lessons can be seen a main preoccupation. This is aptly demonstrated by the next example involving the members of Earl's group (3E) consisting of five quite reserved boys including Rufus. It was my observation that these boys kept to themselves and hardly communicated with most of their classmates other than providing what seemed to me to be rather curt responses to questions posed to them. What really distinguished these students was their attitude to school work and learning. They seemed to show no interest in their learning and I never saw the boys participate in any lessons. They rarely took out any books during lessons and hardly produced any class work, regardless of lesson, subject or teacher. However, despite being assigned to specific seats in their class, the boys always changed their seats to be in close proximity to each other. And, together, these five boys would spend entire lessons chatting quietly

while doing very little, if any, class work. In this case, the boys withdrew their attention from the lesson and focused their attention on one another in what would constitute a sustained rival encounter. Thus, it may be reasoned that the boys' disengagement may in part be a manifestation of a general lack of commitment to school. Besides my observations revealed that generally speaking teachers failed to challenge the boys' actions, reprimand them or make any demands on them and this may have contributed to the persistence in their behaviour.

5.3.6 Alternative Activities

This final category of quiet disengagement consists of a range of miscellaneous tasks not included in the previous ones, done either as one-off tasks or on a more frequent basis. One form of engagement in alternative activities was seen in the use of portable games devices [i.e. Play Station Portable (PSP) or Game Boy]. This was an activity that was enjoyed only by certain boys who had access to these expensive devices and they often became engrossed in these games in certain lessons. The following accounts illustrate this:

Many times I caught Irwin glancing at something under his desk or he seemed to be fidgeting with something under his desk, I paid special attention to him in those lessons where the students were noisy or being difficult. I soon realised that instead of completing the class exercises he was occupied with some other gadget. I later learnt that he was playing games either with a Game Boy or PSP; or listening to music from his iPod or mobile phone. I had a conversation with Irwin about the games. He informed me that the PSP belonged to his brother but he brought it along to school and enjoyed exchanging games with his friends in the class. The games, it seemed, were quite addictive as Irwin played the games before and after lessons as well. He, along with some of his peers who sat close by occupied themselves in this venture, being as discreet as possible. It was difficult to identify any earpiece used because the students hid these under their shirts and place them on their ear when the teacher was not looking or was otherwise distracted by disruptive students. Students also found an opportunity to play with their games when the teacher was dealing with other students' queries, misbehaviour, or clarifying concepts. On one occasion I was able to count four PSPs hidden in the boys' desks at the back of the classroom.

Field notes extracts

I play with my games when lessons are boring. Sometimes I find other things to do. I still try to pay attention. Sometimes I chat with my friends.

Irwin: Student Interview extract

Thus, Irwin spent a large part of his time in the classroom playing with these games and it seemed that the mere possession of a game served as a factor which caused him to resist giving attention to the lesson. The use of these games meant that Irwin withdrew his attention from the main lesson to engage in a subsidiary or an alternative activity. Besides, some of the games necessitated sustained concentration and Irwin mainly played them in lessons where the teachers were not strict or attentive enough to realise what he was doing. Sometimes Irwin played the games alone but on a few occasions he exchanged games with his friends who were playing with games as well. Although, Irwin and his friends still played their individual games without necessarily communicating to each other whilst playing, they engaged in a jointly sustained physical activity. As such, it may be argued that the individualised activity of playing the games may have developed in such a way to shift into an alternative collective activity. The use of the games was a deviant activity as these were not allowed in school. Thus, the boys were quite adept at keeping the games concealed from their teachers and during my period of observation, Irwin and the boys were never caught playing games.

Another alternative activity was the use of mobile phones in lesson, a practice observed in all the Form Three classes. Students called their friends, sent text messages, played games or listened to music on their mobile phones. Officially, the use of mobile phones was strictly forbidden in lessons so students tried to ensure that they were not caught by their teachers. If a phone was confiscated, students were required to pay a fixed sum for its retrieval, have their parents collect it or get it back at the end of the term. Thus the use of mobile phones could be

described as a deviant activity which caused students to become unfocused on the main activity and consequently engage in a subordinate one. These two forms of alternative activity illustrate some of the more typical ways in which students entertained themselves. However, occurring more infrequently were behaviours such as reading novels, removing braids from the hair, sorting or cleaning out school bags, polishing shoes and doing puzzles. In all these activities individual students withdrew their focus from the lesson for a particular length of time and engaged in other forbidden activities.

5.4 The Complexity of Students' Disengagement

So far, I have discussed a range of types of behaviour that students engage in when they manifest forms of disruptive and quiet disengagement. The general assumption would be that students engage in one or other of these behaviours during a given lesson, either singly or in collaboration. However, students' behaviour is not so straightforward and can take a variety of forms within the same context or in different contexts. For example, under certain conditions, particular students could engage in quiet behaviours which can be that are perceived as a form of disruptive disengagement. This is illustrated in the following account of Bertram's behaviour in lessons as provided by Heather:

... from Form one Bertram would fart in the class and everybody would laugh and the teacher would have to go and come back with the principal (laughing); I told Bertram his mother should send him away (laughing) I think every teacher have a problem with him...

Student interview extract

Here, Bertram's fart was not necessarily loud, but at the same time it disrupted the lesson. One could argue that Bertram did not withdraw his attention from the main

lesson but acted within the official agenda. However, such behaviours cause others to 'flood out' of the official encounter as there is a 'drift' in focus to the offender. Moreover, the behaviour is seen to be disruptive as it has elicited a response from the teacher, which in this case was sending for the principal.

This illustrates that it is possible for students who generally displayed quiet disengagement to become disruptive under certain conditions. This also seemed to be the case with Petra, who had the potential to become disruptive when provoked by members of Ben's group or by others. Additionally, it was suggested that Petra's sustained sleeping in particular lessons may be seen as a strategy to prevent the manifestation of disruptive disengagement which occurred when demands were made on her by the teacher to work.

The contextual variability of students' behaviour was also evident in cases where students' disengagement shifted from individual to collective acts and vice versa. This shift in disengagement is illustrated by the following examples. In the first, members of Michael's group did not collaborate in an act of disengagement and Petrus individually withdrew his attention from the lesson:

Petrus takes a pen and touches Jake with it. However, Jake ignores him and continues to do his POA [Principles of Accounts] work; Petrus tries again to touch Jake with the pen, giggling as he does so. Jake does not look at him. Petrus asks him a question, trying to entertain a conversation but Jake is clearly not interested. Being ignored, Petrus settles down and takes a piece of paper from his desk and constructs a paper butterfly. The bell soon rings and the teacher gives some home work. Jake writes down the home work but Petrus does not even write it down. After lesson I ask Jake what he thought of this subject. He informed me that it was one of his best subjects and he was hoping to do it as an option in Form Four.

Field notes extract: POA lesson

In this case, Jake has refused to collaborate with Petrus in joking around, a behaviour that they would normally have engaged in. In essence, most members of

Michael's group have focused their attention on the POA lesson and, in particular, Jake's interest in the main lesson on this occasion was sufficient to keep him away from any side involvements or other replacement activities. As such, Petrus was the only member of the group who was unfocused and without the mobilisation of support from his friends (Turner, 1983) he individually manifested a form of quiet disengagement, that of constructing paper animals.

In this next example Bertha has continued to disengage from the lesson while the other group members who were once disengaging have resumed their class task:

The teacher gives students instruction to write a report based on the various elements that they were discussing. She then sits at an empty student's desk at the front of the class, assisting students who come up to her with their report writing. A group of girls at the back of the class are talking loudly and laughing. The teacher looks up, reprimands the girls and instructs them to get on with their task of writing the report. The girls do not look pleased but all of them except Bertha begin to work. The teacher looks up from her work again and realises that Bertha is not writing. She asks Bertha to write out the report but Bertha says that she is not going to do it. Since the others have settled down and are working, Bertha is now quiet but does not do any work. She stares around the classroom fiddling with her fingers. The teacher resumes her previous task of correcting the students' reports. At the end of the lesson, all the girls, except Bertha, hand in their report. The teacher asks Bertha for the work but Bertha has not done it. She reprimands Bertha for her disobedience and asks Bertha to report to the staff room with her to do the report.

Field notes extract: English lesson

Here, with the exception of Bertha, the students who were talking loudly settled down to work after being chastised by the teacher and can be said to have flooded into the main activity. In contrast, Bertha became oppositional by refusing to complete the class task and has failed to refocus her attention on the main lesson. In this case the students' disengagement has shifted from a collective to an individual act. Furlong (1976) used the notion of 'interaction set' to illustrate this variability in student behaviour. Hence, in view of their interpretation of other actions, students are able to move in or out of 'interaction sets' as the classroom

contexts change (pp. 49-50). The implication is that those who often engage in deviant acts may not always do so but may conform in some circumstances.

So far, I have argued that students' behaviour at Southall may vary under particular circumstances. However, one criticism of earlier studies that have focused on the contextual variations in students' behaviour is that they have failed to relate students' disengagement to their general orientation (Hammersley and Turner 1984: 169; Woods, 1986: 129). In this regard, it is possible that students can display typical behaviours across a wide range of circumstances which may be the basis for the development of a general orientation. As such, the findings revealed that particular students engaged predominantly in a limited type of behaviour which may be consistent or stable across contexts. This was evident in the case of Rufus: he seemed to adopt forms of quiet disengagement across different contexts which included quiet chatting, resting, daydreaming as well as doodling or scribbling. These behaviours all appeared to be in keeping with his general orientation to learning. As such, Rufus seemed to demonstrate a carefree attitude towards his school work and an apparent lack of interest in his lessons. Not only did he opt out of his class tasks but he did not engage with some of his lessons from the onset. In this regard, his Maths teacher saw him as a 'useless, lazy student'; his mother also described him as a 'lazy child who did not practice his school work' while some of his classmates portrayed him as 'lazy' and 'copycat' based on sociometric data (see Appendix 5b).

However, not all typical actions may be reflective of the establishment of a general adaptation to school, as illustrated in the case of Eric. He seemed to manifest specific forms of disruptive disengagement across various classroom contexts which were inconsistent with his positive orientation to school and with his

attitude to his school work. For example, Eric made noises, comments or remarks, called out to passersby and questioned the teacher. Besides, I had never observed him to be quiet in any of his lessons. Yet he was a high aspiring student of average ability who was well prepared for lessons most of the time, that is, having the correct books and writing implements. These behaviours are suggestive of a positive orientation to school, identification with the school's goals and values or what can be termed a normative instrumental orientation to school (Brown, 1987).

On further query, Eric provided the following explanation for his behaviour:

'Miss, I just acting like that because of some of the children in the class; they have certain ways I do not like, they think they "in it"²⁶ too much and I have to show them that I am not afraid of them'.

Student conversation extract

By this he meant that some students behaved differently; in this case the students acted as if they were so important that others had to look up to them. However, Eric noted that he was not willing to put up with their behaviour and so his deliberate actions were a means of getting back at certain students. The implication was that Eric became the centre of attraction as a means of being "in it" as well. Moreover, Eric informed me that he did not behave like this at home, a view which was confirmed by his family members. For example, his sister informed me that 'Eric was generally a quiet and good boy at home'. It seems, then, that at school Eric perhaps struggled for a form of peer recognition which was independent of that conferred by official school values. Thus, with this goal, when among his peers Eric acted as a clown, a presentation which was not necessary in the backstage of his home (Goffman, 1959). Hence, rather than reflecting a general orientation, consistent actions on the part of a student across many contexts may be a strategy designed to manage others' impression, as a means of self-preservation. This

²⁶ Important and deserving respect

behaviour differs from a general school adaptation in that it is related to informal status acquisition rather than to the official school values or goals. Hence, Eric's behaviour was being manifested as a reaction against the actions of particular peers rather than being an expression of a general dislike of the general workings of the school or retaliation against a specific aspect of school life.

This use of the notion of self-preservation as an explanation for students' deviant behaviour has previously been advanced by Turner (1983). He was of the view that particular students at Stone Grove School adopted 'identity management' strategies to avoid being labelled as 'swots' (Turner, 1983:125). In keeping with this view, Eric's strategic aim seemed to be to challenge the authority of those peers who were perceived to be of a higher status than him in terms of peer culture. Consequently, the lines of action he adopted included 'information control' (p.127) where he worked at home and messed about at school, and 'displays' (p.125) where he manifested certain deviant behaviours to attract attention to himself. Eric's actions also accord with the behaviour of Measor and Woods' (1984) 'knifedgers' who concealed the amount of work done while being openly deviant. In this regard, Hammersley and Turner (1984) argued that students will evaluate the payoffs or costs of possible lines of actions in terms of their extrinsic and intrinsic gratifications, including the identity implications of these actions (p. 170).

These issues, associated with the informal status acquisition among the students, were not peculiar to Eric, and some students from other Form 3 class groups at Southall were faced with a similar struggle. For example, in the aforementioned account provided by Alvina she stated that, 'all the children on the

other side by the window, they think they too high class²⁷, like we lower than them, that's how they behave, these girls'. Likewise, in reference to her classmates, Olive noted that 'most of the children in the class feel they are too high class for me'. However, whereas Olive and the members of Alvina's group responded to this identity dilemma by keeping to themselves, Eric's response was to challenge the views of those who felt that they were superior to him in terms of peer culture or better-off than he was in social class terms.

Although this study did not have an expressed aim of examining gender differences in students' disengagement, the findings revealed a distinction in the forms of disengagement manifested by boys and girls. For example, most forms of disruptive disengagement were displayed by boys including making noises, comments/remarks, calling out and questioning the teacher. By contrast forms of quiet disengagement were generally distributed across both sexes. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a slight tendency for girls to engage in more specific kinds of quiet disengagement such as sleeping, structured writing, note writing and alternative activities. On the whole the extent of disengagement was greater for boys than for girls, which is in keeping with the earlier literature (e.g. Reid, 1986).

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored patterns of students' disengagement in school classrooms. In doing this, I drew on Goffman's work, notably his concept of 'focused gathering' or 'encounter', to examine the diverse ways in which students

²⁷ Higher standard, better off or more important

disengage from their learning. Within this framework, disengagement is defined in terms of withdrawing attention from the main encounter, that of the lesson, and simultaneously engaging in deviant acts that contravene the lesson, classroom or school rules.

In doing this, I organised my account in terms of two dimensions of students' disengagement: non-disruptive – disruptive and quiet – loud. Although, there were overlaps between some of the categories, this framework highlighted significantly different patterns of behaviour. In particular, the findings showed that students' disengagement tended to take either quiet or disruptive forms. Some of the more typical forms of quiet disengagement included resting, mental withdrawal, physical withdrawal, writing, quiet chatting and engagement in alternative activities. Frequent forms of disruptive disengagement included making noises, jokes, loud talking, quarrels, comments, calling out and questioning the teacher. Although some of the behaviours discussed in this chapter had already been identified by previous writers, they did not provide a clear differentiation of the types of disengagement. Hence, I have provided a more fruitful way of describing forms of disengagement.

Although there was much variability in students' disengagement, some students consistently manifested particular types of disengagement across various contexts. Moreover, the findings showed that most of the quiet forms of disengagement were committed as individual acts whereas most disruptive disengagements were collective acts. However, student behaviour is not so straightforward as it did not automatically fall within one of the four categories. For instance, although most quiet disengagement took a non-disruptive form, the complexity of student disengagement was demonstrated by the manifestation of quiet disruptive behaviours. Furthermore, the findings showed the following movements in students'

behaviour within and across frameworks. This was illustrated by the shift from quiet non-disruptive individual acts to potentially loud disruptive individual acts as well as the shift from loud disruptive collective acts to quiet non-disruptive individual acts.

An interesting finding was that while many of the informants whose behaviour I was observing were low achievers, much of the time they engaged in non-disruptive disengagement. This is contrary to the common impression often derived from previous studies that seem to indicate that low achieving students from bottom streams (who were not classed as requiring special educational needs) had the proclivity to engage in forms of disruptive disengagement (e.g. Hargreaves, 1967, chapter 6; Lacey, 1970, chapter 4). Rather, the core informants in this study frequently engaged in forms of quiet non-disruptive disengagement.

In this chapter, I have described the general patterns of disengagement among a wide range of students at Southall. However, in order to explore the factors that seemed to shape students' patterns of disengagement in the subsequent chapters, I will focus on this small group of core informants on whom I have detailed information. I will begin my analysis by examining those factors that stem from the teaching-learning context in the class which will be the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: STUDENTS' INTERPRETATION OF TEACHER BEHAVIOUR

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw that students manifested various forms of quiet and disruptive disengagement, either on their own or collaboratively. One major factor which can influence forms of disengagement in lessons is teacher behaviour. Over the years, there has been a considerable amount of educational research on teacher behaviour. A lot of this literature has been within the psychological tradition and has focused on more particular aspects of teacher behaviour (e.g. see Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009; Skinner and Belmont, 1993; Wubbels et al., 1985). Some of the specific issues which have been the focus of research include: *motivation, competence, personality, beliefs and practices, characteristics, expectancy, effectiveness, misbehaviour, teacher-student relations and perception of teaching behaviour*. Much of this literature presupposes that there is a direct relationship between teacher behaviour and students' action. However, in line with the tenets of symbolic interactionism, we should not expect to find a direct relationship here, the effect of this factor will be mediated by students' expectations and interpretations of their teachers. Given this, it is important to approach an understanding of the effects of teacher behaviour through the perspectives of the students. If we are to understand how teachers' actions affect students' behaviour we need to know something about how students interpret teacher behaviour. Thus, understanding students' perspectives on teachers' behaviour is crucial in explaining their ultimate disengagement in the classroom.

Symbolic interactionists see interpretations as central to explaining individual behaviour (Furlong 1985: 103). From this viewpoint, individual behaviours do not occur in isolation but are based on the meanings that others' actions have for the agent. With regards to the classroom, Evans (1985) argued that 'teachers and pupils enter into the context with attitudes, interests [and] expectations...which form the basis for action and interpretations of the problems and possibilities which schooling presents' (p. 12). Thus, to a great extent, students' classroom behaviour is a response to their interpretation of teachers' behaviour as key authority figures in the classroom (Hargreaves, 1972). In this regard, students adapt their behaviour to their interpretations and assessment of teachers' actions (Woods, 1983:18). Students take various factors into account in assessing teachers' behaviour. More specifically, they judge teachers in terms of some notions of how they think these teachers ought to be, that is, they have some notions of an ideal teacher. In some ways, this conception of 'ideal teacher' parallels Becker's (1952) argument that teachers' treatment of students was based on their expectations of how the ideal student should behave in classroom situations. Moreover, this concept of 'ideal teacher' has been studied by previous interactionist writers. For example, Gannaway (1976) and Nash (1976) analysed students' perspectives and focused on how they evaluated their teachers based on their expectations 'good' teacher behaviour. In other research, students' interpretations have been analysed in terms of some notion of offence (Rosser & Harré, 1976; Marsh et al., 1978; Werthman, 1963, 1970); criticism and justification (Bird et al., 1981) or neutralisation techniques (Tattum, 1982). In the sections that follow I will explore the ways in which students at Southall evaluated various aspects of teachers' behaviour.

6.2 Teacher Behaviour and Student Disengagement

Against a background of ideal conduct, students interpret teachers' behaviour in terms of their instruction, personality and discipline. These three aspects of teachers' behaviour are considered in the following sections.

6.2.1 Teacher Instruction

One aspect of teachers' behaviour that students seemed to take into account, not surprisingly perhaps, was various aspects of their instructional behaviour. Students complained that some lessons were too difficult or challenging, as they were unable to understand the subject content. For example, a frequent concern for Velma was that she 'didn't understand the work', 'was confused' or 'didn't know the answers'. Some of these complaints are illustrated by the following excerpts:

BORING: - conjugating English to Spanish; I learnt nothing; I didn't understand the work

Spanish Period 5: 07/06/2010

I had to answer a composition; it was challenging; I learnt nothing new because I didn't know the answers; the lesson was boring

English A Period 4/5: 08/06/2010

The lesson was boring I wrote notes but didn't understand it cause I was confused

IB Period 6: 09/06/2010

In a similar way, Irwin found it difficult to understand the content taught in some of his French lessons. For example, he recounted that:

I find French complicated; I don't understand it; some teachers do not explain enough and sometimes I fool around when it gets boring

Student interview extract

Likewise, Trudy found her Spanish lessons difficult, as noted in the following example:

I did nothing this lesson; it is too had; I learnt nothing because I didn't understand anything that was taught; I feel that the lesson is boring

Spanish Period 2: 09/06/2010

From these accounts, it is clear that sometimes the students felt that a lack of understanding prevented them from making any further progress in the lesson. Thus, understanding the lesson content or class task was important for these students. However, they were able to cite lessons where they understood the lesson content as exemplified by Sam's account:

I was doing an exercise on subject-verb agreement. The lesson was very good as I understood the topic and did the exercise; I got mostly all correct.

English A Period 6: 10/06/2010

Likewise, there were lessons where students were willing to commit to an otherwise challenging task, as illustrated in the following cases of Trudy and Velma respectively:

I drew during the lesson- drawing words in the centre of the page; it is a fun lesson; the lesson is challenging but it went well because I didn't have to write any notes

Arts Period 5: 07/06/2010

There was Spellings this lesson. The lesson was exciting and challenging; it went well because the students were participating.

English A Period 2/3: 16/06/2010

These examples demonstrate that, for the students, a challenging lesson did not necessarily lead to disengagement. However, other factors are mentioned that may have been equally vital to the success of the lesson, such as not having to write class notes or a high level of participation by the students.

Yet another aspect of instruction assessed by students was the extent to which adequate explanations and support were given in lessons. In addition to simply imparting knowledge, students expected teachers to explain the information given. This is illustrated in the case of Loren who reported that:

Some teachers give too much work and they not explaining enough-just giving home work; but they have to explain as well; sometimes I do not understand the work and the lesson is boring

Student interview extract

Wayne's complaint was similar:

Some of the teachers do not explain things; I like Maths the most because I could understand it a lot; I don't like Spanish because I don't understand it; the Spanish lesson is boring as the teacher will give work with no help

Student interview extract

These two examples illustrate that where students thought that the teacher failed to explain the lesson content or provide additional help they found it difficult to understand the class task or homework. Such situations may be breeding grounds for disengagement. However, where support was provided students understood the lesson content and remained engaged in lessons, as illustrated by Olive's remarks:

I like English a lot; the English teacher will make you understand something if you don't get it; she will go over something ten times until you understand it

Student interview extract

One possible explanation for students' lack of understanding was that the lesson was pitched too high for them. The lesson pitch refers to the degree to which the difficulty of the lesson is matched to the students' ability levels, and whether learning tasks are differentiated to take into consideration variation in knowledge among students. However, when faced with a class that is highly differentiated in terms of ability, it will be difficult for the teacher to pitch the lesson exactly so that it is right for all students. In this regard, most teachers probably pitch the lesson around the middle of the class. This means that for some students the

lesson will be too difficult and for others the lesson will be too easy. Thus, when there is a discrepancy between the teacher's pitch of the lesson and the pitch that would suit a particular student they may become unhappy and complain and evaluate the teacher accordingly, and this could ultimately lead students to resort to forms of disengagement in lessons. Alternatively, where the lesson presumably was pitched just right for these students they found the challenge of the task tolerable.

A related cause of students not understanding seemed to be the pace at which lessons moved. In the following example Velma found the lesson boring as it was moving too fast for her:

I wrote notes and worked out calculating a balance equation; the lesson was boring; the lesson went badly cause I hate the teacher and she moving too fast with the work; I was upset and so I slept during the whole of period 8

Chemistry Period 7-8: 08/06/2010

In this case, keeping up with the teacher was difficult for Velma, causing her to abandon her class task and resort to sleeping. Thus, where the pace of the lesson is too fast students may turn to forms of disengagement. It is interesting that students, especially the informants, did not speak about the lesson pitch being too low, the lesson pace being too slow or what was being presented was what they had already covered or knew. One explanation for this is that the informants were all low achievers who were taught in a mixed ability teaching groups and as such pitching the lesson at the average learner is unlikely to have resulted in the demands being too low for them.

Students also expressed frequent concerns about lack of variation in both the lesson activities and teaching method. Thus, students expected teachers to use a variety of class activities and to vary their teaching method. Such a view is illustrated in the following log extracts by Velma:

The lesson was boring because she didn't give us any activities.

French Period 1: 07/06/2010

I listened to the teacher while she was talking; this lesson was boring because the teacher was just talking and we were doing nothing;

SS Period 8: 09/06/2010

Thus, Velma seemed to welcome the diversity in her class tasks:

I wrote notes, discussed the notes and answered some questions; this lesson was fun cause I like to write and we were writing lots of notes; I learnt the meaning of social control; it went well cause the children was attentive and were writing the notes; I learnt new things; I felt excited

SS Period 3: 11/06/2010

Similarly, this variety in class tasks was noted by Trudy, as evidenced by the following log extract:

I wrote notes, drew and discussed with the teacher and students about what was taught. It is very interesting; today we learnt about the parts and structure of a flower; the lesson went well because the class wasn't boring; it is interesting

Biology Period 7: 07/06/2010

Besides, Trudy's preference for variation in class activities was acknowledged when she remarked that:

the teacher should explain the topic, give activities; play educational games so we can pick up faster; teachers should change the method of teaching; they writing notes and doing it all the time which makes the lesson boring and sometimes students fake headaches or bellyaches; the teacher should not come in class with the same method every day; when lessons are boring I talk to some of my friends

Student Interview extract

Thus, the exclusive focus on teacher-centred teaching methods (seen by some students as talking too much) with little or no scope for student activities was disliked and it was this exclusive emphasis on monotonous tasks that led to forms of student disengagement in lessons. During such lessons students frequently chatted or excused themselves from their class tasks by faking illness, a strategy I had seen used in many lessons. Goffman (1963) saw such behaviour as a means of masking disengagement as individuals conceal their physical presence in the class with 'a veneer of acceptable visible activities' (p. 58).

For some students their evaluations were related specifically to the lesson content or more generally the subject that was being taught. For example, a lot of students cited French and Spanish as subjects that they did not like and, as such, these subjects saw a high incidence of disruption and disengagement. In this regard, Marcus remarked that, 'quite a bit of students do not like French and Spanish'. Likewise, Rufus reported that: 'Some subjects like French and Spanish, I just don't like it'. Additionally, Esther explained that: 'I find French boring... although the teacher is not teaching properly and she does not know how to handle the class, the subject itself is kind of boring'. Loren also echoed this view when she noted that: 'I do not like French; the subject itself is boring'.

While many of the students from the whole year group had a general dislike for modern foreign languages, a few students reported their dislike for other subjects. For example, Velma related that 'TD [Technical Drawing] is challenging and boring "cause I hate the subject'. Likewise, Petra found Maths boring and usually did nothing during these lessons. She documented her view in her learning log when she wrote: 'I really hate this subject'; 'I have learnt nothing'; 'I feel that this lesson is so "dame" boring and is a waste of my time'. Besides Maths, Petra also found IT [Information Technology] to be 'boring' and 'a waste of time' and explained that: 'I don't like IT, I just don't like the subject; I find the work hard at times'. From these cases above, it is clearly suggested that students' dislike for the subject taught was enough to generate some disengagement in lessons. My observation was that under these conditions students opted out of lesson tasks and ignored teachers' efforts at curbing disruptions. In certain cases teachers themselves seemed to justify students' misbehaviour on grounds of subject utility:

There are many students who do not engage in lessons. Most of these students find the subject too difficult and complain that they will not need it later...There are also some who

say they will only concentrate on the subjects they will write for CXC and so they do not participate in my class.

Teacher questionnaire response

However, in some cases, this indifference to the subject was related to parallel dislike for the teacher, as explained in the following section.

6.2.2 Teacher Personality

I have included in this category concerns with the general deportment of teachers as well as specific concerns about teachers' rudeness, lack of enthusiasm and their inability to make lessons interesting.

One element of personality students assessed was teachers' level of enthusiasm and their ability to make the lesson interesting. An example is given in the case of Trudy who complained that the English teacher was not able to motivate students to learn:

If the lesson is boring I rest my head on the desk or talk to my friends or find something else to do; like the English lesson, it does be mawez. By the time the teacher comes to the class everybody mawez, everybody want to sleep...

Student interview extract

The term 'mawez' used in this context conveyed a tendency to feel tired and bored as the teaching was not appealing to students. In cases like these it was common for some students to ease their weariness by chatting, or even sleeping during lessons. Besides, Trudy recounted that: 'some children biss (truant) the class when they do not like the teachers' and they 'fool around in the class when the lesson is boring'. Thus, perceived lack of enthusiasm on the part of teachers seemed to result in student disengagement. However, this was not always the case as the following log extract by Petra shows:

Did my work; it is a good subject but really boring; I learnt about William Shakespeare; the lesson went on badly; the teacher likes to 'get on'²⁸ and is boring; the teacher is too boring

English Period 4/5 14/06/2010

Here, the teacher was seen as a 'boring' individual who was always complaining. Although, her lack of enthusiasm was recognised, it did not lead to disengagement as Petra was otherwise committed to completing her English class task²⁹ as she believed English to be an important subject.

Other complaints about aspects of teachers' personality were not directly linked to their instructional style. As such, in certain cases, students seemed to express a general dislike for teachers. For example, one of the complaints that Velma documented in her log book was about the general deportment of her Maths teacher who was a cover staff³⁰. This is illustrated as follows:

I talked and did some work; this lesson is boring because I hate the teacher; I learnt nothing because I don't understand the work; I hate how the teacher talking and I hate her;

Maths Period 2/3: 08/06/2010

I talked and wrote; it was boring; it went bad because I hate the teacher; I was vex about the lesson; I learnt that I must not criticize the teacher cause he/she don't have to teach me; I must not judge anybody by the outside cause maybe by the outside he/she is nicer than something you can't imagine

Maths Period 4: 11/06/2010

This dislike for the teacher prevented Velma from working during her Maths lessons and it was during these lessons that she engaged in passing notes to her friends, a practice I had observed in other lessons too. Similar sentiments were expressed about the Chemistry teacher. For example, Velma reported that she hated her Chemistry teacher as she 'gets me sick'³¹. Likewise, Sam voiced his concern when

²⁸ To complain and quarrel

²⁹ Petra had a different English teacher from Trudy and from Olive and Loren.

³⁰ Velma's Maths teacher had been on extended medical leave since the second week of the third term and cover lessons were taken by other teaching staff.

³¹ In this context the term 'to get someone sick' means to frustrate and annoy someone.

he stated that: 'I love the subject but it is very difficult and the personality of the teacher I don't like'. Moreover, Heather presented the following account of her Chemistry teacher:

There was this teacher that was teaching us IS [Integrated Science] in Form One, everybody was afraid of her; now she is our Chemistry teacher. Before she say something everybody panic; before she open her eyes, the children say she has the eyes of a beast...

Student interview extract

It can be deduced from the above accounts that these students disliked the Chemistry teacher because of her sternness. It might have been expected that this teacher characteristic would have been a deterrent to disengagement. However, this did not deter students from disengaging in these lessons, and both Velma and Wayne still slept for extended periods during their Chemistry lessons.

Another personality concern centred on what the students saw as teachers' rudeness. This is illustrated in the case of Rufus who complained about his Spanish teacher:

Some subjects like French and Spanish are boring... for Spanish, the teacher attitude³² has a lot to do with it- she is rude

Student interview extract

This specific complaint was also expressed by Loren. She was of the view that:

The woman she is very rude; she is very rude; she says don't let me throw myself at you³³. That's not the right way to talk to children; if you want the children to listen to you don't act like that; you can't say 'I don't like the likes of you' and you can't throw paper at students.....

Student interview extract

³² It seemed that student use attitude to refer to arrogance seen especially in the manner of speech.

³³ 'Throw oneself at' is an informal way of saying lunge at someone with the intention of attacking.

Alvina voiced similar concerns when she argued that 'the Spanish teacher, she does "shout behind" [shout at] people too much and she has attitude'. Likewise, Olive was of the view that 'the attitude of the teacher prevented students from liking the subject'. It appeared that students used the term 'rude' here in a specific way to mean 'attitude'. Hence, in most cases, the attribution of teacher rudeness led to a dislike of the subject matter being taught and consequent disengagement in lessons.

However, the Spanish teacher provided the following explanation for students' behaviour:

There are many students who do not engage in lessons. Most of these students find the subject too difficult and complain that they will not need it later. Others are simply uninterested in school and are unwilling to try. Students also say that they are intimidated by me or may dislike my attitude and so purposely ignore class work. Others do not seem to care how they do. Such students have never acknowledged/explained to me a reason for their behaviour. There are also some who say they will only concentrate on the subjects they will write for CXC and so they do not participate in my class

Teacher questionnaire response

The above accounts seem to suggest that the teacher and students behaved in ways that were not in each other's interest. This is confirmed by other sources of information. For example, the head teacher described her as a highly motivated, enthusiastic and promising teacher; yet my observation was that she seemed to concentrate her teaching efforts on those who showed an interest in the subject and who were willing to participate. Woods saw this behaviour as a survival strategy, a form of negotiation where the teachers chose to ignore certain forms of behaviour as long as they are not perceived as 'institution-threatening or publicly flaunted' (1977:280). It is also possible that the teacher used her personality as a defence against the students who were 'sussing' her out during her initial encounter in the

classroom (Ball, 1980; Beynon, 1984) as she was a newly appointed staff member who had been a recent A Level graduate with no prior teaching experience.

The difference in behaviour on the part of teachers and students as a means of managing classroom life is seen by Pollard (1982) in terms of their attempts at supporting their self-interests (interests-at-hand) through a working consensus. Thus, Pollard (1982) argued that these interests-at-hand reflect the ways that teachers cope with various physical, biographical, material, institutional constraints and dilemmas that impinge on their pedagogical practice. It seemed to me that, in this case, the main constraint was the teacher's age and position in the career structure, and her main interest-at-hand was the preservation of her self-image and professional autonomy. Pollard was of the view that teachers' interests-at-hand can only be fully satisfied by obtaining compatible student behaviour which is an element of the working consensus. Since, this was not the case with this teacher, her coping strategy took the form of 'rituals and routines' (Woods, 1983:110) where she taught those who showed an interest and ignored the other students as long as they did not disrespect her. In light of this, Esther was of the view that:

the Spanish teacher is rude but the students don't really disrespect her; most of the time she have to tell them keep quiet but they will not disrespect her....

Student Interview extract

In other cases students complained about the lack of respect that teachers showed, which may amount to rudeness. A case in point was Diane's complaint about her Maths teacher as illustrated below. Diane was of the view that:

...they believe they can act so because they are teachers ... like my Maths teacher she just come and tell me shut my dirty mouth in the class...when I try to answer the question she just turn around and tell me to shut up, I say Miss the word is not shut up; you "ca'an" tell me shut up because if I tell you to shut up you will tell me I am being disrespectful and bring me to the Principal.

Student Interview extract

This specific element of respect was also highlighted by Petra who reasoned that:

I would like to be treated with more respect; some teachers are "insultive" and I don't like the way teachers treat me- sometimes teachers shout at me and sometimes I shout back

Student interview extract

It appeared that students used the term 'disrespect' to refer to the manner in which the teacher communicated to students (as the language used was perceived as being disrespectful). Hence, the teacher was seen to demonstrate a lack of respect as she failed to observe the rule concerning respect. However, this raises issues about whether or not an offence has been committed by the teacher, exactly what the social rules concerning respect is and whether the same rules of behaviour should equally apply for both teachers and students. For students, as long as they interpret the teachers' behaviour to be unfair, and they have concluded that an offence has been committed by teachers, they respond by engaging in various forms of disengagement.

Another teacher personality characteristic that students disapproved of and complained about was the unfairness of actions taken. For example, in this extract below Diane complained that the teachers were biased against her due to prejudice. She reported that:

some of the teachers are unfair; every time the teachers just coming, like sometimes, from Form One when I used to give trouble they just hate me; before anything they quarrelling in the class; they have to quarrel with me and tell me something; they does get me vex.

Student interview extract

Here, Diane complains that some of her teachers were unfair as they labelled her based on knowledge of her former misbehaviour. These perceived actions often prompted students to engage in various forms of quiet or disruptive disengagement. For example, Diane recounted that she sometimes got upset and answered the

teacher back, and at other times she would not bother to continue participating in the lesson, resorting instead to an off-task activity such as drawing.

In this example, Diane's complaints of unfairness were related to her perception of discriminatory behaviour on the part of teachers. She reported that:

...the teachers, they not fair (...) they not being fair at all, ...you see all the children that looking like they rich and they mafia³⁴ ... well ... they showing all of them respect like they, they worth more than that person or that person. Well, my home room teacher.... she does give me all the wrong and thing... you see the person looking like they mafia and ... they rich ... they showing them more appreciation and thing like that.

Student Interview extract

From Diane's account it appeared that preferential treatment (respect and appreciation) was shown to particular students based on specific characteristics which in this case was being 'rich and mafia'(wealthy). Diane's assessment was that such prejudice on the part of teachers resulted in her being given 'all the wrong', which to her was unfair. Conversations with teachers and peers revealed that Diane often retaliated by challenging or confronting her teachers and was perceived as an uncouth individual.

These aspects of teacher personality relating to rudeness, respect and unfairness have been previously highlighted in the research literature. For example, Rosser and Harré (1976) noted that two distinct categories of offences committed by teachers included a) overt insults (use of insolent remarks or offensive verbal statements) and b) offences of unfairness including comparison to an older sibling and being 'put down' (belittled or made to feel inferior by negative comments made) by virtue of their position as children or pupils (p. 175). In both cases, students responded by engaging in deviant activities and consequently drawing on principles

³⁴ Wealthy and/or highly respected or renowned individuals

of reciprocity or equilibration to justify their actions (p. 175-176; see also Marsh et al., 1978:44-45). In a similar way, Werthman (1984) found that if a gang member concluded that he was being discriminated against or treated randomly he did not modify his behaviour (p. 219) and engaged in delinquent acts. With regards to the Caribbean, Evans (2006) contended that there was evidence that particular students suffered verbal abuse and disrespectful treatment from some teachers on a continual basis. In her view 'this type of teacher-student relationship...may be one contributing factor to students' disengagement from learning experiences and from school and may in part explain the low academic achievement of these students' (2006:7).

6.2.3 Teacher Discipline

The nature of the discipline used in the classroom was also relevant to students' assessments of their teachers. For some students discipline was a key factor which shaped their engagement or disengagement in the classroom. Students often complained that teachers were not able to control the class. This was especially the case with French lessons, illustrated by Velma's log book entry:

I wrote and talked with my friends and listened to the teacher. The lesson is too noisy because the teacher don't know how to control the class; I didn't learn anything because the class is noisy and the teacher can't teach; the lesson went badly because the students wasn't listening.

French Period 1: 07/06/2010

Here, Velma's perception was that the teacher was not able to control the noise in the class and was unable to command the attention of students. And she saw this situation resulting in 'the French teacher straining her voice and the students still not listening'. This in turn prevented students from focusing on their tasks during lessons thereby generating further disengagement. Similarly, Olive was of the view

that 'the children do not listen to the French teacher; she is too soft with them'.

Likewise, Esther reported that:

the children does not listen and make noise and the teacher ending up not teaching anything and we not learning nothing; French is boring; the French teacher is not strict enough to handle the class...because the teacher not teaching properly; she does not know how to handle the class and it's kind of boring.

Student interview extract

This lack of classroom control was also seen in the Family Life Education [FLE] lessons. For example, Velma reported that:

FLE is boring because the teacher talks too much; the children call her 'mum'; she can't control the class.

Student interview extract

In a similar way, Heather explained that:

the FLE teacher is soft; yeah, they would tell her she too old wrinkled, you need to retire because like she too soft because she say she raised her children and did not have trouble with them like that and things so you find she always soft, she taking her time with the children; yet still you find they still take advantage on her

Student interview extract

Thus, it seemed that teachers' classroom control was analysed in terms of whether teachers were strict or soft, with the soft teachers being frowned upon. This issue of the teachers' strictness and their ability to control the class is central to other researchers' accounts of students' evaluations of their teachers, in the UK. These accounts showed that effective teachers were assessed firstly by their ability to maintain order before any judgment about whether they impart knowledge. For example, Gannaway observed that for some students the most important concerns in evaluating the performance of teachers were order and discipline. In other words, the order test was seen as a necessary preliminary evaluation that teachers had to pass before moving on to be assessed on any other criteria (p. 194-195). Other

writers have also argued along similar lines (e.g. Furlong, 1976:165; Hargreaves, 1972:143; Marsh et al., 1978: 38; Nash, 1976: 87)³⁵.

It can be seen from students' accounts I have presented here that they disliked teachers who were too soft. In particular, students identified soft teachers as those who are afraid of the students; could not handle the class; could not teach properly; are ignored by the children; have a soft voice and walk out on the class. These teachers were dealt with in a number of ways. The most frequent 'retributions' (Rosser and Harré, 1976) highlighted by the students at Southall included ridiculing teachers by directing jokes at them; calling them names; picking on teachers; taking advantage of them and stressing them out.

Students at Southall contrasted soft teachers with those who were strict. For example, this is illustrated in the case where Loren contrasted the French teacher with her English teacher:

They do not do this with the English teacher; don't mind her, she will give you something in a way, like she will act like us but tell us in another way, like she saying-I making you all talk all your talk and after, at lunch time, I taking all my minutes, that's why we always settle down.

Student interview extract

This view suggests that some students preferred teachers who had stricter control of the class. At the same time, students frowned upon the teachers who were too strict. In this regard, Alvina remarked that:

Some teachers are too strict...they overdoing it, shouting behind people children, being rude and having attitude.

Student interview extract

³⁵ However, discipline may not necessarily be the key element in students' assessment of appropriate teacher behaviour. For instance, the students in Tattum's (1982) study placed greater importance on instruction rather than discipline: 'the effective teacher was someone who can interest and occupy a class, for it is boredom that leads to indiscipline' (p. 95).

It seemed then that students expected teachers to strike a balance between strict and soft. They preferred those teachers who were strict yet reasonable, and who were able to have a rapport with them. This was the case with the English teacher identified above, who was able to 'act like us but tell us in another way', that is, get down to their level but still punish them. This desire for a balance between strict and soft teachers is very much in line with Gannaway's findings. His students frowned upon a teacher 'who is able to keep order but is too strict' (1976:55). However, their hero was 'a complex character capable of generating freedom within an ordered framework' (ibid). Thus, the ideal teacher represented 'a fine balance between freedom and control' (1976:53). In a similar way, Marsh et al. (1978) found that the students placed great emphasis on interpersonal respect and admired staff who could 'hit a balance between total rigidity and disciplined freedom, for example being 'pretty strict but quite friendly' (p. 52). To them, 'a good teacher is someone who'll take a good joke but will make us work to get work done' (p. 53). The parallel between my findings and those of other studies relating to the UK is interesting given the differences in geographical, cultural and institutional context, and in time period.

6.3 The Complexity of Students' Interpretation

So far, we have examined students' interpretations of teachers' behaviour, and how these influence their disengagement. However, it should be noted that students' interpretations are not so straight forward as other considerations are factored in their definition of the situation. Thus, there were occasions when the students seemed to criticise the teacher or the lesson but nevertheless remained

engaged. An example was seen earlier in the case of Petra when she continued to do her work even though she thought that her teacher was boring and liked to 'get on'. This variability in actions across different contexts based on students' definition of the classroom situation has been analysed similarly by Furlong (1976). For example, he argued that students do not all form the same commonsense judgments about their teachers (p. 160) and varied their behaviour across different contexts according to their particular evaluations of the teacher. Accordingly, Furlong maintained that 'classroom situations change in the meaning they have for students and as they change, so will the students' assessment of how to behave (p. 161). Besides, there were occasions where students did not disengage in those lessons that were taught by teachers perceived to be soft as they also assessed whether the teacher's instruction was otherwise effective or ineffective. This shows that there is no automatic relation between a negative evaluation of the teacher and student disengagement.

In other situations, students remained engaged in their lessons despite having a dislike for the subject taught as shown from the following accounts:

Did some class work that was marked; it was relaxing; the lesson went well because we had a lot of work to do so we had no time to be troublesome; I was hardworking

Irwin: Spanish Period 1: 16/06/2010

Did an exercise on subject verb agreement; the lesson was very good- a work of wonders; the lesson went well since everyone was focussed

Sam: English A Period 6: 10/06/2010

Wrote down the sections we have to study for exams; it was a good idea; the lesson went well cause the children were attentive; I feel great

Velma: French Period 8: 16/06/2010

These students didn't like language lessons but sometimes they nevertheless found the lessons interesting or did the class work. How the other students behaved was

also an important consideration. Thus where other students cooperated by being attentive, the lesson was often perceived to have gone well. So, it is not just a matter of how individual students evaluate a particular teacher but how other key students behave in a particular lesson is also relevant. However, other context factors may equally be relevant in students' modification of behaviour. For instance, the core informants' logbook accounts were made during a week where students were revising for forthcoming examination and it was possible that success in their examination was instrumental in some students' decision to focus on the lesson.

This ability for students to interpret and assess the actions of others is seen in cases where they disapproved of the behaviours of other students in the lesson. For example, Esther recounted that:

In some of the classes the children does not listen, they making noise and the teacher ending up not teaching the class anything and we not learning nothing..... The children in the class are rude, they don't respect you...The children disrespect the French and FLE teacher.

Student interview extract

Likewise, Trudy was of the view that:

Some of the children are very rude; they answer the teacher; the teacher cannot talk to them; they give the class a bad name.

Student interview extract

From these extracts it can be seen that the students partly attributed teachers' ineptitude to their peers' lack of respect for or rudeness to teachers. These explanations, advanced as a way of making sense of classroom behaviour, attest to the complexity of students' decision making. They also demonstrate that students have expectations not only of teachers but also of themselves as students. However, even though they do not always live up to these, they nevertheless expect teachers to live up to their concept of the ideal teacher. Hence, as in the cases

above, students expected teachers to be tough or strict enough to discipline those who were making noise or were rude.

So far, I have identified three criteria by which students evaluated teachers. However, while they sometimes concentrated on one or other criterion at any given time, students often combined these criteria in making an assessment of the teacher. This use of combined assessment criteria was quite evident when student spoke of the lessons that were successful or where teachers approximated to their notions of the 'ideal teacher'. For example, when asked to talk about lessons that they enjoyed the students provided the following information:

The Agriculture teacher is a very nice woman; if you do not do your work she gets very mad; The Agriculture teacher she will give you another chance to get the assignment done although I always do her assignments; I want to work in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Olive: Student interview extract

I like SS the most; the teacher is fun; The SS teacher helps the students to understand; review the work; take time to make you understand; uses examples, past experiences and humour to make you understand and is still able to give you notes; I like SS: I am able to talk and relate to the teacher easily; the teacher is helpful; I think that it is a great lesson and the teacher is great.

Petra: Student interview extract

My favourite class is Biology; the teacher is easy to understand; I can understand him better than anybody; I have a good rapport with him and can chat with him because he lives just by my home; I like biology because of the types of activities we do – going out, exploring; explaining; classifying; the class is very interesting.

Sam: Student interview extract

The Agriculture teacher is very strict; she will push you and not give up on you; she will hit you with a palette or send the chalk at you; she will spell the word for you; Agriculture is interesting; I would like to work in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Trudy: Olive: Student interview extract

The reasons provided by students seemed to be based on a combination of teacher behaviours. Students simultaneously draw on all three aspects of teachers' behaviour in judging the success of their lessons. Thus, students enjoyed lessons

with varied activities which drew on their experiences; they also appreciated the supportive teachers who were able to help them understand the lesson content, motivate them, have a good rapport with them using humour and still be strict with them. Moreover, these explanations reveal that it is difficult to separate teacher personality from discipline or their teaching as there are cases where teachers express their personality in their teaching or disciplinary practices. It is this interrelated nature of teachers' behaviour that adds to the complexity of students' interpretations.

It should be noted that students will by no means agree in their judgments of particular teachers on particular occasions. Moreover, although students may have certain expectations of teachers, they all may not necessarily have the capacity or willingness to commit personally to their image of the ideal teacher. Hence, whereas some students may think that this is how teachers really ought to behave, others may simply use the notions of the ideal teacher as a way of criticising or blaming other people for their misbehaviour. Besides, the explanations given for their actions may not necessarily mean that students are pro-school or otherwise committed to their learning in class, where the teacher approximates to the ideal. In essence, whether students are committed or not, they still use this notion of ideal teacher as a cultural resource that they can draw on in the course of their interactions to partly account for their own behaviour or talk about their schooling experience. Hence, it is possible that where a teacher approximates to the ideal there may still be students who disengage, and it is possible that other factors may be equally important in students' decisions making and consequently influence their engagement or disengagement from learning. In the following sections I will consider two other institutional factors that may influence students' disengagement from learning: teacher absence and punctuality; and noise levels in the school.

6.3.1 Teacher Absence

Teacher absence was an issue at Southall. During a six-day observation period staff members were observed to be absent for a minimum of fifteen lessons, with Maths registering at least six cover lessons. Although teachers may have had legitimate reasons for their absence, the impact of teacher absence on student disengagement was significant. At Southall a new policy on the provision of staff cover during their absence was implemented during the first term in the academic year. Prior to the implementation of this policy, teachers were appointed by the administrative staff to provide cover for lessons when fellow teachers were absent. However, teachers felt that this arrangement took away from the limited non-teaching time that they had for planning, preparation and assessment. In view of this complaint, it was decided by the principal that cover would be sourced from within the subject department and therefore departments should be responsible for arranging cover lessons for subject teachers who were absent. In addition to this, it was the responsibility of absent teacher to set work for their classes.

In this regard, the head of department was charged with the responsibility of ensuring that classes were supervised by a member of department. In the event of staff shortage or unavailability, help could be solicited from other departments. However, the more common practice was to provide work for the classes and a student-elected class representative was made responsible for ensuring that work was received and that students remained on task to do the given work. It was my observation that during the fieldwork period many cover lessons remained unsupervised by staff and often the class representative had to seek appropriate work for the class sometimes returning with little or no set work. In the absence of staff, many students opted out of the class task and engaged in other activities, at

times becoming quite noisy. Moreover, most times, the class representative's attempt to keep the class quiet proved futile. Some of the activities that were either observed or logged included physical withdrawal from lessons to pick mangoes, eating, listening to music, chatting with friends, lazing around, laughing and having fun, playing various games, using phones and reading novels. This is illustrated by the following log book accounts:

I picked mangoes these two lessons; it was exciting as the teacher wasn't there

Music period 7-8: 07/06/2010

Talk to my friends; the lesson was fun cause the teacher wasn't there

IB period 6: 08/06/2010

I talked and had fun during the lesson because there was no teacher and we were 'running our mouths' [talking a lot]

FLE period 1: 09/06/2010

There was not much of a lesson just a session; the teacher was absent; the students next to me were playing their so called cricket; these students behave like wild animals-how humiliating

Maths period 4: 10/06/2010

While some students saw the absence of their teachers as a welcome break from their lessons, others were concerned about this issue:

We did nothing; we sat down in the class laughing; I learnt nothing; I felt that we were forgotten

Maths period 1: 08/06/2010

We did nothing this lesson; the lesson was boring cause the teacher wasn't there

Biology period 7: 09/06/2010

We had no teacher so we just sat down on the lunch tables; it was a bit boring

PE period 6: 15/06/2010

I talked and ate in the lesson; the lesson was quite boring as the teacher was not there

FLE period 1: 16/06/2010

We didn't have any classes; the lesson went badly because there wasn't any teacher in our presence. I felt unhappy because we need a teacher for class as this subject is compulsory

Maths period 5: 16/06/2010

So, when the teachers were absent, many students engaged in off-task behaviours and sometimes became noisy which disturbed others in neighbouring classes. Similarly, the noise in other classes disturbed students in their lessons. Additionally, when staff was absent, students often found it difficult to settle down in subsequent lessons and some teachers took considerable time off their lesson to get students to settle and be in a frame of mind to work.

6.3.2 Teacher Punctuality

Teacher lateness was also a problem at Southall and was recognised by the head teacher as a growing concern. At Southall, students remained in a single classroom for the most part of the school day, being taught in mixed ability tutor groups. This meant that teachers moved around the school to teach their various lessons. And it was not uncommon for teachers to be late to lessons, sometimes up to ten minutes. This length of time gave students ample time to become engaged in deviant activity and often became disruptive or noisy. As a result, some teachers took time to get the class settled and valuable lesson time was lost. Moreover, it was even more difficult to settle the students if they had spent the previous lesson engaging in a range of deviant activities due to teacher absence. Teacher lateness was frowned upon by some students. For instance, during a lesson one student Marcia remarked to me that:

the children make useless noise in the lesson and we learn nothing; the teachers 'self, come in late, take time to settle the children and get them to be quiet; by the time she ready to teach us almost half of the lesson gone already.

Student conversation extract

6.3.3 Noise Level in the School

Noise was an issue to contend with at Southall. While there is a minimum amount of acceptable noise in lessons or classrooms, the noise at Southall was noticeably high. Apart from teacher absence and lateness, and teacher inability to control the class, a major factor contributing to the noise at Southall was the physical structure of the school. As such, the physical context of the classroom can influence the behaviour of students and thereby encourage disengagement. This is a point that has been recognised by Stebbins (1976) who argued that certain types of educational context frequently encouraged students' disorderly behaviour.

At Southall, the noise was generally confined to classes based in the wooden huts. The classrooms in the wooden huts were small rectangular units with a floor area of approximately 225 sq ft. As indicated earlier, the classrooms were partitioned to the front and back and were built with louvered windows on each of two sides to admit light and ventilation in the hot weather, but to keep out rain, direct sunshine. However, the wooden partitions and louvered windows failed to prevent or keep out auditory and visual distractions from neighbouring classes, and offered much opportunity for disorder and noise. It seemed that the noise had become so accepted as a part of school life that some students had become accustomed to it. As one informant, Irwin, recounted: 'the noise that the children making does not disturb me; I am accustomed to it and plus, I myself does sometimes make noise as well'.

However, while some students were unperturbed about the noise, a few found the noise disturbing as illustrated by the following students' accounts:

The noise that the students make disturbs me. The noise in the other class disturbs me and I try to do something else when I cannot concentrate. I find that the students are too noisy.

Student conversation extract

The lesson is too noisy because the teacher don't know how to control the class; I didn't learn anything because the class is noisy and the teacher can't teach; the lesson went badly because the students wasn't listening

French period 1: 07/06/2010

The children made so much useless noise so I sat down quietly writing my notes. The lesson went well but the class need discipline and manners to teachers

SS period 7-8: 16/06/2010

Thus, the level of noise in the class prevented students from concentrating on the lesson and consequently caused those who withdrew their attention from the lesson to substitute deviant activities for their class tasks.

6.4 The Issue of 'Boredom'

In talking about or documenting those aspects of teachers' behaviour that they disliked, students frequently used the word 'boring'. However, they seemed to use this word in several rather different ways. Sometimes, it seemed to mean tedious or not interesting, but at other times the students seemed to use it in a more general way to express disapproval. Other writers have also identified boredom as a key issue for students. For example, Gannaway acknowledged 'boring' as a common word in students' vocabulary, which was used when they did not understand the content of the lesson, when they did not enjoy a task like writing notes and where they did not like coming to school (1976: 51). The term 'boring' has also been used to convey students' perception of inappropriate teacher behaviour, for example, having boring lessons and causing student to become bored (Nash, 1976: 88-89) or as explanations for students' deviant behaviours, for instance,

having a laugh as a relief from or antidote to boredom (Pollard,1984:249; Woods,1990:214).

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have been looking at how one particular factor might shape students' engagement or disengagement, namely teacher behaviour. In particular, I have been concerned with how students interpret and assess teacher behaviour. Students were portrayed as active agents constructing their own actions and constantly modifying their behaviour based on their definition of the classroom situation. Thus, students evaluated teachers in terms of their instruction, personality and discipline. Interestingly, these three assessment criteria have also been identified by Hargreaves (1972) in a review of studies on pupils' attitudes to teachers (p. 163). However, these criteria are difficult to separate and students simultaneously draw on all three aspects of teachers' behaviour in assessing lessons. Moreover, during the interaction process, norms and values become significant in as far as they provide a basis for interpreting and judging teacher behaviour against an ideal. Hence, where teachers do not live up to students' expectations of how the 'ideal teacher' ought to behave, students often respond by manifesting various forms of disengagement. The complexity of students' decisions was seen in the consideration that they gave to other aspects of the classroom situation. For instance, how other students behaved was an important influence on their decisions to disengage. Nevertheless, not all negative disapprovals of the teacher or of lessons resulted in students' disengagement. This implies that

teachers' behaviour is not the only source of students' disengagement in the classroom and in the next chapter I will look at another potential factor.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PEER RELATIONS

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw that within the classroom setting various teacher-related factors seemed to play a key role in generating forms of student disengagement. The complexity of students' decisions was seen in situations where disapprovals of the lesson or teacher did not necessarily lead to forms of disengagement. This suggested that other factors might also be important influences on decisions about whether to remain engaged or to disengage. One of these is students' relations with their peers, both within school and outside. After all, adolescents often look to peers for approval, admiration, respect and support (Coleman, 1961; Perdue et al., 2009).

Students' peer relations have previously been analysed within the social psychological literature in terms of how students experience themselves as members of a group. In particular, emphasis has been placed on addressing the psychological needs of individual students in different school contexts as well as how the contexts address those individual needs to enable the student to function optimally (Osterman, 2000). Particular areas of enquiry that deal with students' psychological experience have included peer acceptance and rejection, student involvement, sense of belonging and relatedness, peer support and student emotional autonomy (Libbey, 2004; Light and Dishion, 2007; Osterman, 2000). The quality of students' interpersonal relationships is seen as being dependent on the extent to which needs are fulfilled through peer association. Within the school

setting, research has also focused on the link between the quality of students' interpersonal relationships and different dimensions of their school behaviour and performance (e.g. achievement, classroom involvement, disaffection, disengagement, dropout, engagement, interest in class, participation, school perception, withdrawal) (Buhs et al., 2009; Ryan, 2000; Vitaro et al., 1997).

Within a symbolic interactionist perspective students' peer relations are analysed differently. Students are seen as social entities rather than simply as psychological beings and, hence, the focus is on the interpersonal interaction among students. Blumer (1969) argued that the most important feature of human association is that individuals take each other into consideration (p. 108) not merely at the point of initial contact but actually throughout the process of interaction (p. 109). This requires a sense of mutual awareness as well as the ability to perceive, define and judge other people and their actions and to act in relation to each other in a coordinated way, with actions being intertwined, interdependent or fitted to form joint actions (p. 109). Through continual or sustained interaction students may come to share perspectives and form friendship groups. This does not mean that individuals always imitate each other or do the same things (Charon, 1992: 167). Through their actions they can challenge or reject one another, as well as symbolically supporting each other (Furlong, 1976:27). Thus, the effect of peer influence is significant as a means of seeking support or confirming behaviour. Nevertheless, individual students purposively choose their behaviour as a result of the way they interpret the actions of other students, particularly those of their friends.

Forms of school organisation play a major part in structuring possibilities for pupil-pupil interaction thereby affecting the formation of friendships among pupils

(Turner, 1983: 113). At Southall, students spend a large part of their school day together in a single classroom and tend to interact much less with students from other tutor groups (see Appendix 5d). The implication is that they are likely to develop friends within their tutor group. Thus, the social relations that students develop with each other at school are likely to have important consequences for the actions that they take, including the manifestation of forms of disengagement.

7.2 Peer Relations and Student Disengagement

In this section, I examine how my core informants' peer relations seemed to influence their disengagement. I consider differences in the strength of peer relations within school and outside, comparing students who vary in these respects, as outlined in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Categories of peer relations

| | | School | |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| | | Strong Relations | Weak Relations |
| Out of School | Strong Relations | Velma Trudy | Petra Wayne |
| | Weak Relations | Irwin Rufus Sam | Olive |

7.3 Strong Relations in School, Weak Relations out of School

School-based peer relations were particularly important for core informants whose home environment restricted other forms of peer interaction, as was the case for Sam, Rufus and Irwin. There are several reasons why this may occur: for example it may arise from the geographical location of a student's home, from home upbringing, or from individual choice. In the case of Sam, he lived remotely on a hillside and was not in close proximity to the local community. Further, Sam's parents kept to themselves and hardly went out, and this pattern of behaviour did not encourage him to socialise with peers in the community, or even to visit his uncle, who lived a few hundred yards away. In the absence of neighbourhood friends, Sam spent the time at home in the company of his siblings. However, this did not seem to be his wish as he spoke eagerly about a visit to one of his classmates who lived 'not too far from him'. Sam related that he was not happy when he had to stay home from school because of financial difficulties, as he enjoyed socialising with his friends at school. Thus, in the absence neighbourhood peers, he socialised with friends at school which meant a lot to him. As he explained:

I really like coming to school a lot; it is boring staying at home ... I feel quite upset when I have to stay at home because I get to be with my friends at school; I only miss school when things are bad because of lack of finance.

Student interview extract

It can therefore be reasoned that Sam relied on his classmates to provide him with the fun and happiness from contact with children of his own age, which he did not get from his home environment. This positive attitude on the part of Sam to coming to school to socialise with his friends is contrary to some evidence that he had an anti-school orientation. For instance, the findings showed that Sam was late on 27 occasions and absent on thirteen occasions during the first two terms of the year in

which the research was carried out (Table 7.2; see Appendix 6a for similar information on other core informants).

Table 7.2: Extract of Sam’s school report showing attendance and punctuality

| STUDENT | FORM | TIMES LATE IN FORM 3 | | TIMES ABSENT IN FORM 3 | |
|---------|------|----------------------|--------|------------------------|--------|
| | | TERM1 | TERM 2 | TERM 1 | TERM 2 |
| SAM | 3S | 13 | 14 | 8 | 3 |

Within the psychological literature, such absence has been shown to be associated to disengagement from learning and student dropout, both indicators of a negative attitude to school (Fredricks et al., 2004). Likewise, based on Woods’ (1979) typology of school adaptation, Sam’s frequent lateness and absences might suggest he was a ‘retreatist’, ‘rejecting both the means and goal of the school without replacement’. However, Sam’s absence was due primarily to financial constraints and he was upset when he could not attend school. Thus, unlike Woods’ retreatist, Sam saw school as a site for socialising.

Irwin was another student whose positive engagement with his peers at school seemed to stem from an absence of contact with people of his own age outside of school. Like Sam, Irwin reported that he looked forward to school:

Irwin: Well, I like the school.... and especially the students
UJL: The students? What you mean by that?
Irwin: Well socialising with my friends

Student interview extract

However, unlike Sam, this positive orientation did not seem to stem from geographical and financial difficulties. Indeed, Irwin seemed to have had the option of playing with friends in his quiet neighbourhood. However, he chose rather to stay

indoors and spent much time playing games on his computer or with his Play Station. Thus, it was within the school setting that he made time to socialise with his friends.

The case of Rufus seems to be somewhere between the other two aforementioned cases. Although Rufus did not experience serious geographical or financial constraints like Irwin, the threat of violence in his neighbourhood had a somewhat similar effect. Rufus lived near a ghetto in the Harbour Vale District and did not like to go out because of the violence that was happening in the surrounding areas. He was also taunted by his neighbourhood peers because of the job his mother held as a vendor of fresh poultry. Consequently, Rufus opted to stay indoors in the safety of his home instead of socialising with neighbourhood peers and spent hours looking at television instead.

Clearly, the desire to socialise with their peers at school might lead to disengagement. One major form of this in the case of these students was quiet chatter in lessons. This type of behaviour was displayed by Irwin as evidenced from his learning log:

Talked to my friends about games; I talked too much and did no revision. I learnt about my friends and that I am very talkative. The lesson itself went well and I learnt nothing this lesson but that I am very talkative.

Spanish Period 5: 08-06-10

Evidently, Irwin became very engrossed in conversations with his friends and his chatter detracted from attention on his class tasks. At times, his chatter degenerated into more disruptive means of communication, such as loud talking accompanied by laughter, and the chances of this were increased if the lesson was found boring. Irwin recounted that his chattiness sometimes landed him in trouble, as he would be

called upon or reprimanded by the teacher. Generally, however, he tried to avoid becoming involved in the disruptive behaviours that his friends engaged in, but rather enjoyed lessons where the teacher was absent as he would get a chance to 'laugh and chat and get to play with my games'.

In other cases the tendency to engage in chatter seemed almost inevitable because students found it difficult to ignore or repel classroom peers. This was the case with Rufus, whose quiet chatter seemed to take precedence in certain lessons leaving little room for the completion of his class tasks, as illustrated below:

The teacher enters and calls the class to attention. It is clear that the majority of students are ignoring the teacher: students are not listening. The teacher carries on with the lesson and introduces the topic; she is unsuccessful in getting the class to be attentive. Rufus is chatting quietly and laughing with some of his classmates. It appears that he has not been listening to the teacher and he has not taken out his book as yet; he is also out of his seat. The teacher sees Rufus laughing and calls on him to pay attention. Rufus becomes quiet at once and begins to fiddle with his fingers. He decides to take out an exercise book from his desk and he appears to be following the instructions given. However, he reverts to laughing quietly with his peers as the teacher has turned away from him to attend to other students.

Field notes extract: French lesson

For Rufus, the chatter was very appealing and in most cases he sought the attention of other classmates to support this activity. On most occasions, Rufus interacted with four other students who, like him, were members of Earl's group. The main preoccupation of the members of this group of boys was chatting during lessons and the members would spend entire lessons chatting quietly while doing very little, if any, class work. This showed that the members of Earl's group shared a similar definition of the situation and chose appropriate actions together (Furlong, 1976: 27). However, when these boys were absent, Rufus changed seats again to be in close proximity to a source of conversation, in essence becoming part of another interaction set. Moreover, as the above extract showed, Rufus couldn't resist the temptation to chat even after he was reprimanded for his actions. Hence, the impact of peer influence is very significant as a means of supporting or

confirming behaviour (Furlong, 1985) and, in the case of Rufus, in-school peer relations played a quite considerable part in influencing his disengagement in lessons.

Of course, not all students in this category used lessons to socialise with friends; some restricted this to time outside lessons. For example, on the basis of my observations Sam mainly limited his socialising with peers to non-teaching times, only doing this in class when the teacher was absent:

I was only talking during the lesson since there was no teacher. I learnt things my friends are good at; it was interesting talking about certain things. I learnt how to beat my friends at certain games. I wished every day was like that.

FLE Period 1: 09/06/2010

I did nothing much this period since the teacher was absent. It wasn't much of a lesson just a session. It was fun while it lasted. It went out well because of no work. I felt happy but sad at the same time since [because of] the subject I got and [having to do] 'no work'³⁶. I learnt how to get funky

Maths Period 5: 09/06/2010

Thus, Sam profited from the opportunity to socialise with his friends when the teacher was absent and they were left to their own devices. Although Sam seemed to relish the time spent with his friends, he did not consider socialising to be appropriate during lessons when the teacher was there. Observation data revealed that although Sam manifested types of quiet disengagement in particular lessons, his disengagement did not take the form of chatter. During lessons, Sam did not indulge in conversations with his friends, nor did he participate in disruptive behaviour with them. Besides, he was able to ignore the actions of other disruptive boys who sat around him, dismissing their actions as 'unmannerly'.

³⁶ Sam was unhappy about the subject options that he was given to study in the next academic year but happy about the fact that he had no work to do during that particular lesson.

This finding that Sam did not socialise in lessons is significant given the expectation that most students would engage in some minor chat in lessons, given that it was very common. It may be that Sam showed a sense of respect for teachers as authority figures in the classroom. Also, unlike Rufus, Sam's behaviour may have demonstrated an ability to move in and out of interaction sets. If this is true, it means that Sam's definition of his classroom situation was crucial in his construction of appropriate classroom behaviour, which included the decision to avoid engaging in classroom misbehaviour or disruptive behaviours with peers during lessons. Since peer influence had little effect on Sam's behaviour in lessons, it seems likely that his disengagement in lessons was determined by other factors.

7.4 Strong Relations both in and out of School

Two of the core informants had developed strong social relations with peers both inside and outside of school. Apart from socialising with a close group of friends in their class, both Trudy and Velma frequently interacted with other peers out of school. Unlike the male core informants who mainly maintained in-school relations, both Velma and Trudy had home environments that facilitated their interactions with peers. Velma was the only girl in her family and had no siblings close to her age range that she could interact with. In addition, there was often a struggle over watching particular television programmes at her home and Velma opted to interact with peers in her neighbourhood instead. Trudy was the youngest member of her family and the only girl left at home as three of her siblings lived on their own. As such, Trudy sometimes profited from the opportunity to visit her siblings on an afternoon after school. Additionally, Trudy's mother was an

Evangelist³⁷ in her church and encouraged Trudy to participate in youth activities at church which took place in the evenings. Thus, whereas Velma socialised with peers in her neighbourhood, Trudy often stayed in Harbour Vale District after school to socialise with friends or sometimes visited her older siblings in nearby communities before going to youth group activities at church, athletics training or returning home. Both girls looked forward to coming to school to be with their friends, and tended to engage in low-level chatter during lessons which took away from the time spent on class tasks. However, there seemed to be some variation in their peer interaction. Whereas Trudy was more inclined to chat when lessons were boring, Velma chatted with her close friends whenever the opportunity arose within lessons. Unlike Trudy, Velma was part of a tightly knit clique in her class and it appeared that the strong friendship ties involved encouraged her disengagement in lessons. In this regard, Velma spent the most part of her lessons discreetly passing notes to her friends and this activity constituted the major form of her disengagement in lessons.

7.5 Weak Relations in School, Strong Relations out of School

Two of the core informants, Petra and Wayne, both in Form 3T socialised quite a lot outside of school. For example, Petra's mother was of the view that: 'she does spend a lot of time walking up and down socialising with friends and she sometimes come in around 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. ...'. In a similar way, Wayne's grandmother recounted that 'he often comes home late; he does not even do his

³⁷ A member of a protestant church who usually served as a bible teacher or who assumed another specialist role such as recruiting, training or developing members of the congregation.

homework sometimes and I have to beg him to do some house work'. However, neither maintained strong peer relations with their classmates.

Indeed, it was clear from the sociometric data that Petra and Wayne were not highly regarded by some of their classmates. Both Petra and Wayne were depicted as socially rejected students by some of their classmates and this placed them on the periphery of their class (Table 7.3 below³⁸; see Appendix 5b and 5c for sociometric nominations for core informants).

Table 7.3: Extract of sociometric nominations for two core Informants

| STATEMENT | Nominations per informant | |
|--|---------------------------|----------|
| | Petra | Wayne |
| SECTION ONE | | |
| Unhappy | 6 | - |
| Selfish | - | 1 |
| Doesn't contribute to group work | 5 | 3 |
| Rude to teachers | 16 | 1 |
| Lazy | 3 | 4 |
| Bothers others | 1 | - |
| Annoying | 3 | 2 |
| Bully | 5 | - |
| Shows off | - | 1 |
| Disrespectful to teachers | 9 | 1 |
| Doesn't boast | - | 1 |
| SECTION TWO | | |
| Would like to have him/her as a best friend (ML) | 1 | 1 |
| Like him/her the least (LL) | 5 | 4 |
| Sociometric Status ³⁹ | Rejected | Rejected |
| TOTAL RESPONDENTS | 24 | 24 |

This had implications for the forms of disengagement that they manifested at school. Thus, several of Petra's classmates described her as 'unhappy, rude and

³⁸ The information presented in Table 7.3 is based on two of the three sections of the sociometric test given to students (Appendix 5a). The first section consists of a list of behavioural attributes that may be used to describe students. These characteristics have been shown to be strongly related to students' peer acceptance or rejection (Sherman and Burgess, 1985). The second section consists of statements used to indicate whether or not students are liked by their peers (Coie and Dodge, 1983).

³⁹ See Appendix 5c for an explanation of the students' sociometric status.

disrespectful to teachers and a bully'. In light of their assessment of Petra, her classmates seemed to ignore her most of the time and my observation was that Petra often seemed effectively to be on her own in the classroom. . And the fact that Petra had few or no friends at school with whom to socialise seemed to push her towards forms of quiet disengagement. With little opportunities available for peer interaction, as we saw earlier Petra spent the most part of her lessons either with her head on the desk or otherwise sleeping, which seemed to be her main form of disengagement. Her sleeping varied in duration, from parts of a lesson to more sustained intervals.

Wayne was also left alone for most of the day and spent some of his off-task times in lessons sleeping or drawing pictures for some of the boys in the class. What distinguished Wayne from Petra is that he had some contact with a few classmates, and where opportunities permitted, he found himself talking, as illustrated in the following field note extracts:

Wayne's group, like the other groups, is making posters in support of Literacy Month. Wayne sits down in his group and begins to play with a 60 degree ruler; he then gets up and walks around to see what the other groups are doing. He returns to his group and begins to talk quietly to one of the group members.

Field notes extract: English lesson

However, the nature of his relations with others in the class is significant. My observations revealed that Wayne's chat was not as sustained as those of the students who had in-school relations. Rather, it took the form of brief exchanges of comments. Moreover, it seemed that his classmates used him for various purposes rather than there being reciprocal friendship relations. In particular, Wayne was often asked to draw pictures for some of the boys in the class. Besides, his interaction with some of the girls was generally limited to running errands for them during break and lunch times. The most frequent request was the purchase of food

items from the school's canteen and Wayne was often chided for getting some of the items on the list wrong. When I enquired about his actions, Wayne explained that he was aware that classmates were 'using him' and he did not know why he continued to do things for them. 'I not worrying about that' he told me as if to suggest that he would have his moment to shine one day. My view was that Wayne's behaviour may be a means of gaining acceptance from his peers even if it meant going to extremes sometimes to satisfy his peers' desires. Thus, since Petra and Wayne were largely ignored by their classmates, they appeared to spend a large amount of their class time in forms of quiet disengagement.

Whilst Petra and Wayne generally demonstrated forms of quiet disengagement, they could on occasion be quite disruptive. For example, the HOY reported that Petra was often taunted about her father's drug habit by the members of Ben's group. This caused her to become quite upset and aggressive, much to the annoyance of some of her classmates. Moreover, in light of the HOY's explanation that Petra had been provoked from the time she began her schooling at Southall, it seemed likely that this prior perception, labelling, or 'reputational bias' may have caused her peers to maintain feelings of dislike for her in subsequent school years (see Hymel et al., 1990; Thomas, 1997). Thus, it appeared that Petra's disruptive behaviour may have created her rejection as her classmates disapproved of her negative reactions to the taunts and provocations received. However, it may well be that rejection by her peers consequently led to her disruptive behaviours. Whichever the direction of influence, Petra's rejection placed her on the periphery of her class and this affected her relations with her classmates and how she was treated by them.

Nevertheless, peer annoyance did not always lead to outbursts from Petra, as the following extract shows:

A class discussion is about to start and the majority of the students are listening to the teacher. Moments later, Petra walks into the lesson and proceeds to sit at her desk in the front row. She sits down with much difficulty as she had to wriggle her way in. She then began to twist herself around in her seat which seemed to indicate that the desk and chair were too close together. She turned around and realised that no one was sitting at the desk behind her so she proceeds to shift that desk pushing it back a bit to allow some ease of movement for her. Shem, [a member of Ben's group] who is sitting two desks away from Petra realises what she is doing. He proceeds to push the desk in front of him to hinder Petra's action. Petra tried again to move the desk but Shem pushed back. After a third failed attempt Petra abandoned this undertaking and turned forward. She had the option of pushing her desk forward but she didn't. She must have realised that the space in front of the class was restricted or that her desk would have been out of line with the others in the front row. Thus, Petra resigned to sitting uncomfortably in her seat and continues to move uneasily. During this time the teacher and other classmates are oblivious to the passing event. I wondered whether Petra's classmates deliberately ignored her and why Petra chose to remain seated in an uncomfortable position instead of reacting or seeking help from the teacher.

Field notes extract: SS lesson

It appeared that when faced with provocations like these Petra was able to exercise restraint to avoid any altercation; and this decision resulted in a quieter form of disengagement than could have otherwise occurred. In light of her response to situations like these, it can be argued that Petra's quiet disengagement may have been constructed within the classroom context as a shield against the undesirable consequences of her outbursts which had the potential to erupt when she retaliated or responded.

Like Petra, Wayne was teased from the onset of his secondary school year at Southall. In his case he was taunted about his birth defect (having a deformed hand). However, unlike Petra, he was ridiculed by students in his class as well as those who were in the higher year groups. When provoked, Wayne would flare up at times and he had the potential to resort to harmful behaviours as happened in the following incident:

Wayne entered the class quite upset and almost in tears. He took a divider [mathematical instrument] from his desk and went back outside saying on his way out: 'I going to stab him'. Two girls tried to stop him but he pushes them aside on his way out. The bells rings and the teacher arrives shortly after; the class has to do a test but Wayne is not around to start the test. When he arrives later, Wayne is still upset.

Field notes extract: French lesson

Wayne later recounted that he tried to avoid retaliating when the students ridiculed him. He stated that 'If I take on the children something will happen'. This suggested that Wayne had the potential to become violent but like Petra was able to exercise some restraint at times.

The significance of peer rejection has been highlighted in the literature on peer relations. For example, some researchers have suggested that rejected students may be ignored, excluded from activities, teased or not be treated well by their classmates (Bierman et al., 1993; Burgess et al., 2006; Rotenberg et al., 2004; Stormshak et al., 1999). In addition, Laursen et al. (2010) have noted that adolescents who fail to navigate the social world present more emotional and behavioural problems than those who are well accepted. Likewise, Dodge et al. (1983) maintained that rejected students seemed to display more inattentive, hyperactive and disruptive behaviours than others. Moreover, other researchers have argued that rejected students are more likely to become angry, short-tempered, aggressive and likely to get in trouble with the teacher (see Kupersmidt et al., 1990; Parker and Asher, 1987 and Wentzel and Asher, 1995).

Nevertheless, in contrast to previous research findings which treat the disruptive behaviours of rejected students as an attention-seeking technique (e.g. Bierman et al., 1993; Coie et al., 1990), this did not seem to be the motive behind Petra and Wayne's disruptive behaviour. They seemed to become disruptive only in situations where they were ridiculed by peers. Besides, these disruptions seemed

to have subsided partly because the culprits had been reprimanded for their actions, and because Petra and Wayne had both learned to control themselves to some degree. This perhaps explains the finding of some researchers that rejected students may display behaviours such as withdrawal, loneliness and depression rather than more disruptive forms (e.g. Bierman et al., 1993; Hymel, 1990; Parker and Asher, 1987 and Wentzel and Asher, 1995).

Although they had few relations with peers at school, both Petra and Wayne were able to maintain contact with peers who were not in their school community. However, their relations with out-of-school peers may have influenced their disengagement, albeit in ways which differ from each other. This tendency for many students who are rejected by most of their classmates to develop peer relations out of school has been well documented in the literature (Coleman, 1961; Parker and Asher, 1987; Lansford et al., 2006). For example, Coleman argued that students lacking friends in school develop social relations out of school as alternative social support. As he put it: 'rather than continuing to hold a negative image about himself, the adolescent will seek elsewhere, will focus his interests on out-of-school matters where he can feel good about himself' (1961: 228).

However, although these extra-school relations may compensate for lack of peer relations in school, the impact of peer rejection may be great enough to encourage forms of disengagement as exemplified in the case of Petra. Although Petra was often absent from school, she stayed away to be with her friends as her mother explained in the following extract:

I went to work this morning and expected Petra to go to school but she didn't go. And when she doesn't go to school she doesn't stay in the house; she all over the place liming⁴⁰ with friends.....

Parent interview extract

In addition to her limited intra-class interaction, Petra was observed to have little relations with students from other classes and she opted to stay at home on some occasions. In this light, one of the reasons Petra gave for her absence was that she felt that she did not fit in at school. She later recounted that: 'If it was not for my boyfriend I would not even be in school... he always talk to me and encourage me to stay at school.' Moreover, it may be argued that peer disapproval had significant influence on her learning and that Petra may have compensated for her rejection by socialising with friends out of school. However, it may very well be the case that Petra's out-of-school relations placed less demand on her to develop friendship relations in school⁴¹.

This link between peer rejection and disengagement has been highlighted by some scholars. For example, Vitaro et al. (2001) contended that many rejected students have no friends in the classroom that might buffer the impact of negative social experiences at the group level and this lack of friends may increase the risk of school disengagement. Likewise, other writers have argued that students who are rejected by school peers are at higher risk for truanting from school and dropping out later, (actions seen as extreme forms of disengagement) (Kupersmidt and Coie, 1990; Parker and Asher, 1987).

⁴⁰ Going out to socialise with others

⁴¹ One drawback of the sociometric test was that peer nominations were limited to those of classroom peers and this may have masked students' popularity in out-of-school contexts.

It appeared from Petra's peer relations that she may have adopted an anti-school orientation to cope with her school life. Accordingly, she disengaged when at school and compensated for lack of peer relations at school by rejecting school to socialise with non-school peers. This means of coping with school life differed from Wayne's adaptation. Thus, unlike Petra, who had the highest absenteeism record, Wayne had the lowest absenteeism figure of the eight core informants, being absent only four times during the two school terms observed. This finding is significant as it suggests that Wayne had some form of commitment to schooling. In this regard, Wayne's view was that 'I don't like to miss school, I like being at school; I get on with most people in my class'. Nevertheless, unlike Petra, his out-of-school associations may have encouraged him to become involved in delinquent acts, a link that had also been found by Coleman (1961: 229): 'The boy or girl may try to find his status elsewhere in deviant subgroups, in vicarious experiences, leisure, in turning his attention completely away from school'. In this regard, Wayne's grandmother noted that Wayne spent a great deal of time with the 'wrong' set of people in the community which resulted in his involvement in 'antisocial' behaviour. Thus, he began stealing, using alcohol and drugs and had had contact with the police and Juvenile Court. The grandmother further explained that Wayne had even sold off items such as expensive chains, clothes, and phones, perhaps to support his drug habit.

Previous research has shown that lack of peer relations at school may lead to involvement in delinquent acts (Kupersmidt and Coie, 1990; Parker and Asher, 1987; see also Klima and Repetti, 2008; Light and Dishion, 2007). However, it is possible that the causal relationship may operate in the opposite direction. For example, it has been demonstrated that deviant peer pressure or peer associations can be critical factors in the subsequent development of disruptive school behaviour

(Eamon and Altshuler, 2004). Based on this present finding, it is not entirely clear whether association with deviant peers or involvement in deviancy caused or had an effect on Wayne's disengagement. The point being made here is that it is expected that association with disruptive or deviant peers would lead to a tendency to display similar behaviours in other social contexts, such as school, but this did not seem to be the case with Wayne. Although he had peer relations with disruptive friends out of school most class lessons saw him being quietly disengaged, only becoming occasionally disruptive when provoked.

7.6 Weak Relations both in and out of School

One informant, Olive appeared to have few social relations in or out of school. Not only did she maintain little interaction with classmates or other neighbourhood peers but she also chose to have few friends. In this regard, her view was that: '...the children are out of hand, wild; I do not like to be with them'. This meant that Olive found it difficult to associate with most students in her class who she felt were wild and unruly. And it seemed that she was not too perturbed about her limited interaction in the class or about developing social relations. Thus, she refrained from interacting with her classmates and kept to herself most times. Olive was a quiet, soft-spoken individual. She compared herself to her step sister who she thought was very outgoing and had many friends including a boyfriend. As she put it, 'My little sister is more open and sometimes I does freak out on the things she does'. Olive was also recognised as quiet, shy, and calm by her mother, teachers and classmates. At school, Olive sat on her own by choice. She would remain seated during all her lessons and did not change seats at all or move around

the class unless going to another classroom. Furthermore, Olive hardly left the classroom unless going to the toilet or occasionally to the shop at recess time. She stood out in her class by virtue of her age and height. At approximately 6'3" tall and being 16 years old, she was the tallest and eldest child in her class and this may have contributed to her decision to keep to herself.

However, this limited interaction on the part of Olive extended to other social contexts beyond the classroom. For example, she did not hang out with any classmates after school, even those who lived near her or who had attended the same primary school as she did. Furthermore, she did not take part in any extra-curricular activities and went home as soon as she was dismissed. Besides, Olive's mother reported that she did not go out in the neighbourhood much, and mainly socialised with her relatives, who she saw on her way home from school. Olive disclosed that she had only one best friend, who lived in her neighbourhood and attended another secondary school. However, she reported that they did not visit each other often but sometimes stumbled upon each other on the way home from school. This aspect of Olive's behaviour does not accord with Collins' (1996) views on the characteristics of quiet children. Collins suggested that in most cases children who are quiet in school are often loud in other social contexts with individuals that they know well, such as the home. On the contrary, this type of solitary behaviour, which is sometimes characterised by shyness, has been shown to be reasonably consistent across context and stable over time (see Rubin et al., 2009; Rubin and Coplan, 2010).

Olive's limited peer relations may have engendered disengagement in specific ways which are yet different from the foregoing forms discussed. As a quiet student, Olive also stood out in her class as her classmates had been described by

teachers as the most 'talkative' group. From what she says, it seems that her disengagement was constructed precisely because the noise and disruption in class prevented her from concentrating in lessons. In addition, her quiet demeanour prevented her from taking action against the disruptive students.

It appeared that Olive had some commitment to engagement in lessons. As such, she reported that she worked hard on her school work and tried to stay focused on her tasks during lessons as evidenced below:

Paid attention in class and wrote down some of the notes on the blackboard. At first, I didn't quite understand but for now it went pretty well.

IB Period 4: 07/06/10

As usual I 'just sat there' I paid attention and if I can I would do my work, if I can't I look forward and try to pay attention.

Maths Period 1/2: 08/06/10

However, Olive recounted that she was often infuriated by the behaviour of her classmates during lessons, which to her was an embarrassment. Thus, she explained that the students in her class made learning during lessons very difficult for her:

I find the children in class very immature, disobedient and disrespectful and they prevent you from learning properly in class. They always chatting and laughing with each other instead of focussing on their work

Student interview extract

Thus, Olive felt this constant misbehaviour created a lot of noise in the class which prevented her from focusing on her tasks as well. In this regard, Olive was quite worried about her classmates' behaviour as evidenced from the following accounts:

The noise that the students make disturbs me. I stay by the lunch table to study but I rather stay home to study. The noise in the other class disturbs me and I try to do something else when I cannot concentrate. I find that the students are too noisy and sometimes I just stare forward in embarrassment'

If I don't understand something in the class I would stare at the teacher or find something else to do like other class work. When the classes are boring I write down on my book, stare at the teacher, look around; sometimes I does just watch the children and shake my head

Student conversation extract

Likewise, Olive documented her concerns with the class in her learning log as follows:

The children made so much useless noise so I sat down quietly writing my notes. The lesson went well but the class need discipline and manners to teachers especially the Social Studies teacher. I felt ashamed because my class got me upset. I was on my best behaviour; these children need to pay attention in class to succeed in life.

SS Period 7-8: 16/06/2010

It appeared from Olive's accounts that she was very frustrated with the disruptive behaviour of the class as it affected her ability to focus in lessons and to understand the lesson content. In particular, she explained that the noise in the class was a problem for her as she could not work in a noisy atmosphere. Consequently, when disengaged, Olive found herself staring around at the students, staring forward or staring at her exercise book giving the impression that she was thinking and working at the class task. At other times, she engaged in other off-task behaviours like completing other school work or writing up notes that were missed due to her tardiness to school.

Olive was caught in a dilemma which made engagement difficult for her. She did not participate in lessons so as to avoid the ridicule of the boys in her class. She reasoned that:

'Sometimes I write a letter to the teacher to tell them that I don't know but I don't say it in front of the class because of some of the boys in the class they laugh at you'

Student interview extract

Besides, Olive was troubled by the disruptive behaviour of her classmates and she found it difficult to confront students about their misbehaviour. Meanwhile, she

resorted to forms of disengagement in lessons, (such as mental withdrawal and copying down missed notes), with the hope that she could get help from the teacher later or even that the students would be quiet to allow her to work as she reported below:

We had to copy down notes for exams. The lesson went well because we were quiet. I felt happy that the class was quiet and on their best behaviour for the first time

French period 6:16/06/2010

Based on the aforementioned findings it can be seen that Olive's disengagement in lessons developed in two ways. First, her quiet disposition prevented her from participating in most lessons. This situation was exacerbated by peer misbehaviours such as laughing at mistakes made in class and ridiculing classmates. This caused Olive to have a fear of communicating, and she avoided making contributions in lessons. This in turn led to off-task behaviours when she was lost in lessons. Second, Olive's quiet demeanour did not encourage her to rebuke her disruptive classmates. Hence, students' misbehaviour or practices such as noise and disruptions were left to continue. This condition, in turn led to poor concentration and lack of understanding. Consequently, this further restricted Olive's participation in lessons and caused her to become involved in other off-task activities during lessons. Either way, the impact of classmates' behaviour drove Olive to manifest forms of disengagement. This supports the view that distinct forms of peer treatment, such as ridicule, joking or neglect, can have effects on students' disengagement in lessons (Buhs et al., 2006).

So far we have seen that the sorts of peer relations that core informants maintained, both within and outside school, influenced their perspectives and strategies within the classroom. However, most informants were active creators of their actions and there did not seem to be a strong expectation or pressure on

students by their classmates to engage in deviant activities. Besides, the findings did not reveal any evidence of behaviours such as name calling or labelling (e.g. teacher's pet or swot) or any work restrictive norm as described by Turner (1983). On the contrary, there seemed to be a strong expectation to succeed among the Form Three students. In this regard, Trudy was of the view that 'we are all hardworking and bright in our class; no one is brighter than the other'. Likewise, Olive recounted that 'I would like to be like Eva. I don't know how she does it, passing all her subjects like that every term; but we all try our best in class'. Thus, most core informants, in theory at least, seemed to strive for academic excellence and did not perceive peer relations to have an adverse effect on their academic progress.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter sought to explore the central importance of social relations in understanding the complexity of student disengagement. Four patterns of peer relations were identified among the core informants. I distinguished between students who had strong peer relations within and outside of school; those who only seemed to have peer relations in one of these two contexts and I identified one student who had few peer relations in either contexts. Students who maintained peer-relations at school tended to socialise during lessons, mainly through chatting, especially in the absence of teachers. Where they did not have friends outside school, peer relations at school may have been essential in providing these students with the fun and happiness that they were unable to obtain otherwise. Some students who had peer relations both within the school and out of school

placed great emphasis on their relationship with friends. For instance, one informant, in addition to chatting, engaged in passing notes among her friends in lessons. However, the need to socialise may not have been as great as in the previous pattern.

Two students socialised with neighbourhood peers and had few peer relations within the school. This led to a situation where the students were taunted by some of their peers and ignored by others. Such marginalising treatment caused the students to manifest forms of quiet disengagement such as sleeping and drawing and, in one case, absence from school. However, as a result of peer rejection, there was the potential for these two students to become disruptive in certain situations, when provoked. Additionally, lack of peer relations had the potential to cause students to either stay away from school to seek the approval of non-school peers or to become involved in non-school delinquent acts. Lastly, one student maintained limited relations both within and out of school. Within the school, Olive's problem was the inability to cope with the noise and disruptive behaviour of classmates. In this case, disengagement took the form of mental withdrawal (staring around and deep thinking), staying home on some occasions and writing up the notes that were missed.

Although core informants were treated as exemplifying a particular type of social relation, there were no automatic relations between their positions within the categories of peer relations and what they actually did in the classroom. Moreover, although there are links between these groupings and the students' disengagement, the categories do not account for all the variation in relations or forms of disengagement manifested by students. In short, the findings suggest that, on the whole, the sorts of social relations that students develop both in school contexts and

outside could play a crucial role in explaining their disengagement in lessons. However, there is one more factor that could contribute to students' disengagement that I will explore: their home situations.

CHAPTER EIGHT: HOME BACKGROUND

8.1 Introduction

The previous three chapters have focused on the forms that disengagement takes in the classroom and how features of that context as well as peer relations seem to shape it. It was seen that students' disengagement reflected their attempts to deal with the demands of classroom life, in particular their interpretations of teacher's behaviour as well as their facilitation of peer relations at school. However, for some students, home background may also be significant in explaining their disengagement at school and by extension their academic performance. The relative importance of home and school factors in explaining educational achievement has been a long standing debate in the sociology of education, and it is worth exploring this briefly.

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a wave of research concerned with factors contributing to social class differences in educational achievement. Some writers and researchers argued that these class differences were a result of home background while others have stressed the role of school-related factors in interpreting class variations in academic performance. In the 1950s and 1960s, the predominant emphasis was on factors relating to home background. Studies of material factors argued that working-class students were seen as being educationally disadvantaged because of material deficiencies in their home background. These adverse material circumstances included undernourishment, sickness, poor housing with lack of a quiet study area, large

family size, and inability to afford educational books. However, during this period, the educational success of working-class students was relatively low, as they were more likely to fail the 11+ examination, and if they did pass they tended to be placed in lower streams in grammar schools. It was argued that, since material poverty had largely been eliminated, the continued disadvantage of working-class students must be explained by their cultural deprivation (Douglas, 1964; Hyman, 1967; Sugarman, 1970). It was argued that there were distinctive cultural characteristics of the working-class including focus on a fatalistic short-term or present-time orientation, lack of or low parental interest in children's education, and inadequate or poor home learning environments. Subsequently, some researchers argued that the educational disadvantage of working-class should be explained in terms of culture *differences* rather than rather than cultural *deprivation* (Bernstein, 1964; Bourdieu, 1977; Willis, 1977).

On the contrary, some researchers have examined the effects of in-school factors on educational achievement. Thus, from the late 1960s, these researchers have argued that working-class students were at a relative disadvantage due to certain school practices which led to their lower academic achievement, often through lowering their level of motivation to work at school. Researches in this vein have focused on general school organisation (Rutter et al., 1979); teacher-pupil interaction (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968); streaming, banding, setting, and mixed ability grouping (Ball, 1981; Hargreaves, 1967; Keddie, 1970; Lacey, 1970). Later studies have also focused on racial discriminatory practices (Mirza, 1992; Wright, 1992) as well as gender discrimination (Kelly, 1987; Spender, 1982; Stanworth, 1981).

While, as we have seen, institutional factors, including teacher-student relations in the classroom, can be important; this does not mean that home factors play no role at all. Furthermore a considerable amount of research conducted in other industrialised countries (e.g. Coleman et al., 1966; Raffo et al., 2009; White, 1982), and more recently in the Third World (e.g. Booth, 2003; Clark, 2002; Edwards, 2002; Evans, 2006; van der Berge, 2008)⁴², has shown the importance of home background, and in particular socio-economic status (SES). With regards to the Caribbean, most studies on students' educational outcomes have focused on the more developed countries of Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago with research on the smaller Eastern Caribbean islands being relatively sparse or non-existent. Nevertheless, Schiefelbein and Simmons (1981) considered family background to be the most important determinant of educational achievement in the Third World. In this regard, Lockheed et al. (1989) concluded that 'prior work may have underestimated the influence of home background on achievement in developing countries' (p. 239). Home background is still highly regarded as a crucial factor which may contribute to students' behaviour and school outcomes, and this chapter will consider how students' material and cultural circumstances may engender forms of disengagement at school.

8.2 Material Circumstances

Levels of parental income, education and occupation are widely recognised indicators of students' material and economic wellbeing and these measures may be used interchangeably to signify SES. However, in St. Lucia, the level of

⁴² Some earlier researches in developing countries which continue to reflect the relative importance of home or family background factors in determining school outcome include: Clark, 1993; Ferguson, 1991; Greenwald et al., 1996; Ho Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996.

household income and wealth, as ascertained from the occupation of breadwinners, is the most commonly used indicator of SES. Based on household income, core informants in this study can be usefully classed as from low, middle or high income backgrounds, which correspond broadly to lower (working), middle and upper class status respectively. The economic status of the core informants did not represent the whole range of the class structure. Six core informants had parents who were mostly home makers or held low paid menial jobs and two core informants had parents who held skilled jobs. This information is presented in Table 8.1 (see Appendix 6b for further information on core informants' socioeconomic background).

Table 8.1: Extract of socioeconomic background of core informants

| Name | Occupation of Father | Occupation of Mother | Financial Status |
|-------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Olive | Hotel Maintenance Worker | Housewife | Low Income |
| Irwin | Architect | Hotel Chef | Middle Income |
| Trudy | - | Hospital Janitor | Low Income |
| Rufus | - | Shop Keeper | Low Income |
| Velma | Hotel Chef | House wife | Low Income |
| Sam | City Council Janitor | Shop Assistant | Low Income |
| Petra | - | Restaurant Kitchen Assistant | Low Income |
| Wayne | - | Head Supervisor Petrol Station | Middle Income |

Based on parents' income, it was deduced that, six of the eight core informants could be classified as from working-class backgrounds and two appeared to be from more middle class backgrounds. This higher proportion of working-class students seemed to reflect the general class composition of the population of Southall.

8.2.1 Living Conditions

In part, the living conditions at the homes of the core informants were a product of their socioeconomic status, reflecting the extent to which parental incomes were able to sustain the families.⁴³

Middle Class Living Conditions

Irwin and Wayne came from more middle class backgrounds. Irwin lived in a large house in a large rural community in the north east of the Harbour Vale District with his father, step mother and three siblings. Wayne lived in a medium-sized house in a smaller rural community in the south west of this district with his grandmother. Both homes were well furnished with all the necessary amenities including inside toilet and bath facilities, stove, refrigerator, electricity and tap water. In addition to having a telephone line at home, Irwin had cable television and a computer with internet access⁴⁴. While Wayne's home had cable television he did not have a telephone line and so there was no internet access at his home. Nonetheless, he still had easy access to computer and internet services at his biological mother's house, a property about seven kilometres away from his grandmother's home.

Working Class Living Conditions

⁴³ It was not possible to provide a rich description of the home or living conditions of all informants. I interviewed the parents of all informants but of these, four were interviewed inside of their home, two were interviewed in the veranda of their home and the remaining two were interviewed at their workplace. Therefore the information provided in the case of Irwin, Wayne, Petra and Rufus is scant. In this regard, I also relied on other sources of information such as the impression I gained from my outer view and partial inner view of Irwin and Petra's home, my prior knowledge of Rufus' home and information garnered from conversation with these informants and their parent(s).

⁴⁴ There were two separate lines available: one for telephone and internet access only and another for cable television access only. It is possible to purchase different packages: telephone only, telephone and internet access, telephone and cable TV or all three services.

The other core informants came from working-class backgrounds. Petra, her mother and five siblings lived with another family (which I shall refer to as host family)⁴⁵. Her home was a large partly wooden four bedroom house with interior facilities and basic furniture (see Appendix 6b and 6c). Additionally, Petra's home had a phone only for use by the host family and cable television for general viewing. Rufus lived with his mother and two siblings on the middle floor of a two-storey building. The property, which was built on a hill slope of Crown lands,⁴⁶ had interior facilities, and basic furniture. However, there was a frequent water shortage in the area and some residents, including Rufus' family, had to carry water from a communal stand-pipe located at the bottom of the hill. His home had cable television but no telephone or internet access.

Olive, Sam, Trudy, and Velma lived in houses built on Crown lands which were smaller than those of the other core informants. For these students, their houses were wooden buildings which in most cases appeared to be sparsely furnished. The houses typically had a table, one or two chairs, one or two-seater settees, and some had a refrigerator. Despite the small size of the houses, most were partitioned into two or three tiny bedrooms with a combined kitchen/dining/living area or a kitchen and a combined dining/ living room. All houses had electricity and running water on the property, two houses had access to inside water through a kitchen tap and the other two had no inside water provision. In cases where inside water was lacking, activities such as bathing, laundry and dishwashing took place in designated outer areas, either under the house or in another structure designed for this purpose. Additionally, three houses had an

⁴⁵ This other family had accommodated Petra and her family due to their impoverished living conditions and had therefore allowed them to share one bedroom in the property.

⁴⁶ Crown lands refer to land belonging to the government. Those who built houses on this land or otherwise made use of it did so illegally without permission from the government, a practice known as squatting.

outside pit toilet and one house had none at all, with sewage being disposed of in the nearby bushes or fields. In terms of communication networks, none of the four houses had home telephone lines or computers.

The rest of the chapter will focus on the home background of three students – Petra, Sam and Trudy – whose circumstances highlight the way in which home background can affect engagement at school, with particular emphasis on their material and cultural circumstances. There are a number of ways in which students' living conditions could have affected their school engagement, and I will explore these.

8.3 Material Deprivation

Petra, Sam and Trudy lacked the material resources at home that were necessary to sustain them and help them to make progress at school. For example, Petra lived in a town centre approximately four kilometres away from the school. She was her mother's eldest daughter; she had an older brother who migrated to the USA about thirteen years previously and had not been heard of since. Petra's mother recounted that three years ago she and her six children lived with their father in a small community about half a mile away from the town. According to her, the family had been forced to separate from their father who, being a drug addict 'worked occasionally and had become unstable'. Consequently, Petra's family moved in with an extended host family of ten members and, as such, her current household comprised a total of seventeen individuals. It would be expected that members of large households would share resources but this was not the case with

Petra's household. Petra and her family were restricted to one bedroom in the house. And her mother reported that she faced being evicted from the property and was actively looking for another place to stay. Petra's mother worked as a Kitchen Assistant in a local restaurant. She explained that living conditions were poor and she had to struggle to provide for her six children who were all under the age of sixteen. In speaking about her home conditions, the mother remarked that:

Things are difficult for me; this morning I was not able to give the children something to eat as things were a bit rough on me. Petra didn't even go to school this morning as I had no money to give her. My little boy could not go to school also as his uniform was dirty and I did not have any soap to wash it today.

Parent Interview extract

Another example of material deprivation is given in the case of Sam who lived in a nuclear family in a rural community approximately eighteen kilometres away from the school. His home was a small wooden dwelling with partitions that separated the other rooms in the house. The house comprised a tiny kitchen and balcony, three small rooms and a relatively larger living area. The house was poorly furnished and there was no toilet or bath facility inside. Sam was the eldest child of the marriage and had three younger siblings. In addition, Sam's mother had an older son from a previous relationship, while his father revealed that in addition to these four children he had many other children that he had to support. Sam's mother worked as a Shop Assistant in a local supermarket while his father worked as a Janitor for Harbour Vale District Council. Sam's father reported that although he and his wife were both working, the income received was not sufficient to take care of the family, especially as he had other outside children to support. The father remarked 'I will not lie, things does be really tight sometimes and I have to 'scrant' (make ends meet) to feed the children and send them to school; sometimes, I have nothing to give Sam to go to school'. Sam himself recounted that he sometimes came to school having had no breakfast or having no lunch. In view of their home situation, the parents encouraged their son to work part-time; as such, on Saturdays he worked at the

supermarket where his mother worked. His father remarked that 'this money goes a long way in helping to pay his school bus or pay for his school lunch'.

In a similar way the financial situation of Trudy's family was reflected in the living conditions at her home and this affected her engagement at school. Trudy lived on the outskirts of Harbour Vale District in a squatter area approximately eleven kilometres away from the school. She lived in a small wooden dwelling with partitions separating three small bedrooms, a small sitting area and a tiny kitchen. Although the kitchen tap had running water, the house had no inside bathroom or toilet facilities. The mother proudly reported that the house was built by her eldest son after she had separated from her husband. Trudy lived with her mother and three other brothers, one of whom attended the same school as she did. She was the youngest member of her family. Trudy's mother reported that she was still married to the children's father but was seeking to divorce him. They had to separate some years ago because of his infidelity. He did not support the family and had been imprisoned for his refusal to pay for Child Support. Trudy's mother worked as a Janitor in a hospital, a job that she had just obtained after being jobless for more than two months. In light of her financial hardship Trudy's mother had difficulties in providing basic sustenance for their household. She reported that she struggled to support her family with the \$150 monthly income. Although her eldest son worked as well, and she encouraged Trudy to sell sweets at school for a profit, providing for the family was still hard. One of the direct effects was that it was difficult to provide three meals for the family and most times Trudy went to school without breakfast and had no lunch or money to buy something to eat. It is reasonable to suppose that this would make it difficult for her to engage at school, on an empty stomach. Thus, based on the foregoing accounts, it can be seen that these three core informants experienced difficult material conditions at home. It is

likely that they suffered as a result of being under-nourished, sick, tired and absent, which in turn may have affected their concentration levels at school and contributed to forms of mental disengagement.

Another way in which the students were materially deprived was that they did not have the resources needed for transport to and from school. Conversations with parents and students revealed that, at times, Petra, Sam and Trudy had no bus fare to get back home. For these students, attendance and punctuality were huge problems as their school records showed (see Appendix 6a). They were unavoidably absent when financial conditions were harsh and were otherwise late when their family had to seek means to ensure that they attended school. For example, in addition to the other reasons given, Petra revealed that the main reason for her absence was having no money for lunch or bus fare. She recounted that, 'I worry a lot about the situation at my home and I prefer to stay home when things are bad'. In a similar way, Sam's absences and poor punctuality were partly related to his home conditions, and he too was concerned about the shortage of funds. His view was that 'it is boring staying at home...I only miss school when things are bad because of lack of finance'. Likewise, Trudy experienced difficulties getting to school on certain days due to a lack of money for bus fare. Whereas Petra had to take one bus to get to school, both Sam and Trudy had to pay two sets of bus fares to get to school. Although, Petra and Trudy appeared to have a high level of absence and lateness, the transportation problem was particularly acute for Trudy, as her family seemed to have the least disposable income among the eight core informants. At Southall, some monetary help towards transportation and lunch was given to students who were quite needy but this had to be approved by the school counsellor after discussions with the student and parent(s). However, based on conversations with parents of these three students, they were not aware that such funds were

available; hence Petra, Sam and Trudy did not receive any financial support from the school.

These three core informants were also materially deprived in the sense that they could not afford the resources they needed for learning. At Southall, students are required to bring in the prescribed text, exercise book, notebook and basic equipment⁴⁷ to every class as written in the school rules and regulations. In St. Lucia, students are required to purchase the set text for each subject area drawn from a list of recommended texts provided by the MOE. However, schools are not obliged to adopt these books as their required texts and may prescribe another text which they feel better facilitates students' learning. Texts used may also be changed to reflect updated versions or better subject content. The families of these three students struggled to provide the necessary books and equipment for their children and this was particularly difficult as the parents had three or more children to maintain. Thus, purchasing text books presented problems for these three students due to lack of funds (more so for Petra and Sam, as Trudy had an older brother who also attended Southall). Moreover, the high cost of books meant that parents had to buy second hand books or borrow the books from other individuals who trusted them with their books.

Sometimes students who are very poor are given a bursary from the government or other charitable organisation to obtain the texts. These bursaries are provided in the form of school books rather than a monetary reward. However, to be eligible for continuous sponsorship the condition was that students were required to perform to a high standard, passing their terms grade. The bursary was

⁴⁷ Basic equipment included pen, pencil, eraser, ruler, sharpener or as required by the subject (for example geometry set for Maths, music manuscript for Music, sketch pad for Arts).

withdrawn if performance was poor. Trudy and Petra received no government support but Sam had received a government bursary to obtain school books returnable at the end of each academic year. However, the bursary was taken away from Sam at the end of his third year at school because he had failed to secure a pass score on any of his school reports since his entry at Southall. As a result, Sam's father had to struggle to get his school books for him, generally purchasing second hand copies.

In view of their financial constraints it was also difficult for families to provide additional resources to support their children's learning at home. Petra, Sam and Trudy noted that they did not have any extra books at home to help them with their school work and did not have internet access either. For Trudy and Sam, in particular, it was difficult to visit the nearest public library or internet café as they were faced with a lack of money for transportation and internet use. Moreover, they preferred to go home after school as they were often hungry⁴⁸. Another effect of lack of funds was inadequate space at home to facilitate home learning. As we have seen, Sam and Trudy lived in very restricted accommodation. This was not conducive for doing homework, not least because there would be distractions from other house members engaged in home entertainment or house chores. Although Petra's home was bigger, she reported that she did not like her living conditions as tensions at home arising from a large household prevented her from concentrating and doing her home work properly. As these students were often absent or late, they missed out on some of the school work and had difficulties in understanding the lesson content. Furthermore, it seems likely that because Petra, Sam and Trudy were not able to access additional material to support their learning disengagement in lessons resulted.

⁴⁸ Although Petra had access to a local library near her home she hardly visited it as she seemed more preoccupied with socialising after school.

The material circumstances were different for those core informants from the middle income class. Both Irwin and Wayne had all their books and equipment for school. Although they both took two buses to get to school, they were given adequate money for transportation and for lunch. In particular, Wayne's mother recounted that she gave him \$20 per day for school, which was much more than the average \$5- \$10 received by other students. In addition, both students had parents who owned a vehicle and who were able to get their child to school if necessary. Here it seems that, for them, material conditions at home were not a factor generating disengagement at school. .

8.4 Social and Cultural Circumstances

Under this heading, I will include parental involvement and support, parental attitudes as well as tensions generated from social issues at home.

8.4.1 Parental Involvement and Support

With regard to Third World countries, parental involvement has been seen as an important determinant of academic achievement (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). It is believed to contribute to school engagement through fostering more positive attitudes towards school, improving homework habits, reducing absenteeism and drop-out, and enhancing academic achievement (see Ho Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996:126).

Parents of the core informants were aware of the poor performance of their child, based on the termly assessment reports, and they all felt that their child was not putting enough effort into school work. However, the home practices of parents, especially those from working-class backgrounds, also seemed likely to affect their children's level of involvement in learning. Most parents worked late hours to help maintain their families and/or had younger children (8 months - \leq 5 years) and spent little time supporting their children with home learning tasks. Additionally, parents reported that they were not able to help their children with school work because they lacked the necessary educational background. Moreover, in view of the demands of other pressing home problems, there appeared to be a lack of supervision of children's homework. And parents also recounted that they were unable to attend school functions, presumably because of the cost of travel. In fact, most of the core informants' parents had limited communication with the school and contact was limited to school visits for collection of reports, attendance at parents' meeting or other requested appointments. This is in line with Ogbu's (2003) finding that there was a gap between parental educational expectations and aspirations and what they actually did to ensure their children's school success (cited in Gibson, 2005: 588). Ogbu saw this as a barrier to the educational achievement of minority students and thereby contributing to the academic disengagement of particular groups of students.

Furthermore, it seemed likely that practices in working-class homes encouraged students to spend relatively more time on leisure activities than on their homework as shown in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2: Relative time spent on activities outside school (hrs/weekday)

| STUDENT | HOME WORK | OTHER NON-SCHOOL-RELATED ACTIVITIES | |
|---------|-----------|--|--------------------|
| IRWIN | ≤ 1hr | internet, computer, television, games | ≥ 4 hrs |
| OLIVE | ≤ 1.5 hrs | television | 2-3 hrs |
| PETRA | ≤ 0.5 hrs | socialising television | ≥ 4 hrs ≥ 3 hrs |
| RUFUS | 0 hr | television | 4-5 hrs |
| SAM | ≤ 1.5 hrs | television | ≥ 4 hrs |
| TRUDY | ≤ 1hr | social/church/sport activities, television socialising | ≥ 4 hrs 1-2 hrs |
| VELMA | ≤ 1hr | television socialising | 2-3 hrs 4-5 hrs |
| WAYNE | ≤ 1hr | football/cricket, television | 4-5 hrs |

This is a tendency which has been found to occur in other Third World countries as well. For example, in her writing about why poor black children succeeded or failed in the Third World, Clark (1993, 2002) found that low achieving students spent more time engaged in unstructured leisure activities such as 'hanging out', talking on the phone, playing games, watching television and relaxing. However, it must be noted that there is no certainty that excessive leisure activities were directly responsible for the core informants' disengagement in lessons, or that those students who were engaged did not necessarily spend relatively less time on leisure activities. Moreover, there is not sufficient information to establish conclusively differences in leisure activities for core informants from working-class and middle class backgrounds.

8.4.2 Parental Attitudes and Values

Parental attitudes and values may have contributed indirectly to students' performance and to some extent to their disengagement. Education is highly valued

by families in St Lucia as it is seen as a way of improving their current economic situation and a means of advancing in society. In this regard, parents frequently had great educational expectations for their children. However, they also had a range of priorities which affected their ability to provide the basic financial and educational resources necessary to support their children's learning.

One such parental priority centred on the acquisition of forms of home comfort, such as entertainment systems. For instance, in spite of their low income, some parents were still able to afford luxuries like cable television payable on a monthly basis and even to provide mobile phones for their children. Additionally, two core informants also spoke of setting up email and Facebook accounts as their parents would be purchasing computers and seeking internet access for their homes. Yet, as we have seen, parents struggled to maintain their family to the point that on particular days, some students had no bus money or meal for school. Again this suggests parents' reluctance to alter their spending habits or their inability to manage their budget to purchase material resources to cater for the learning needs of their children.

Apart from entertainment, another priority was seen in parental choice of secondary school. The education system in St Lucia did not operate on a zoning policy, which meant that schools usually had no catchment areas. This is unlike the UK or US where students are allocated places at local schools within the designated catchment areas (although this practice is increasingly changing). In St. Lucia students attend secondary school on the basis of the score received in the Common Entrance Examination which is comparable to the 11+ exams in the UK. In this regard, schools are unofficially ranked by the public in terms of academic performance and parents often choose schools based on their academic reputation.

rather than for convenience. Information from teacher questionnaires revealed that Southall was ranked fifth out of twenty four in terms of preferred school choices of parents and students, at least in Harbour Vale District. As such, parents preferred to send their children to Southall which was located further away from their homes despite the fact that there was another secondary school in close proximity to their homes, even within walking distance⁴⁹. However, this school arrangement seemed to have a negative effect on core informants' educational achievement. For example, they were often late or absent due to lack of funds for bus fare and school meals, and when at school they found themselves mentally withdrawing from lessons, thinking about their home conditions. Besides, they all were low achievers who were performing poorly at school. Thus, this parental priority seems to suggest that although parents placed great value on education, they were less reluctant to change the school that their children attend to help reduce their financial burden.

8.4.3 Social and Emotional Tensions within the Home

Besides the financial problems experienced by the families, there were interpersonal issues which may have caused some tensions at home and consequently impacted on the core informants' engagement in lessons. An example is provided in the case of Petra whose tensions were linked to the nature and composition of her household. Petra recounted that she was often frustrated about her home situation. More specifically, she shared a household with a host family. Her household consisted of seventeen individuals: five adults (including her mother) and twelve children, including herself (five of which were her siblings). Petra recounted that she often got into conflict with the children of the host family. She

⁴⁹ All informants lived nearer to another school ranked lower than Southall but preferred to attend Southall (even if it was not their school of first choice).

claimed that she was always in an unfair position as she was discriminated against and the host family seemed to support the actions of their children. The mother's view was that she was aware of the problems but was not in a position to do anything about it since she was not living at her own home. Rather, she was more concerned with getting a new place to live as she faced being evicted from the house and would be required to seek alternative accommodation in the near future. Thus, Petra recounted that she preferred to 'socialise out as it is better than staying at home'. However, her mother reported that although Petra spoke to her often she did not readily talk about her problems. She felt that Petra was angry and rude to her at times and wanted to find out what was bothering her daughter. It may be that Petra's home situation made her very bitter as neither she nor her mother was in a position to improve matters.

The tension at Sam's home was of a different nature. Sam's father disclosed that he was experiencing problems at home with his wife. He admitted to verbally abusing his wife in the past but was currently being counselled. Nonetheless, he reported that his wife's first son was the current source of conflict within the family. He claimed that she placed more emphasis on this son relative to her other children and supported him in his deviant activities. Sam's father noted that he had a 'very good' relationship with his son whom he considered 'a very obedient child'. Sam himself admitted that he was closer to his father who spent much time with them at home. His mother worked until 6 p.m. daily and was hardly around. In this light, Sam's father indicated that he was not sure whether family problems were affecting Sam's performance at school as his son did not relate any issues affecting him. However, it was clear that these parental feuds bothered Sam at school. Sam recounted that he was aware of the situation at home and 'does not even know what to really make of it'. Sam disclosed that at times he found himself thinking about

home concerns and 'how life could be made better' for himself and his siblings. He explained that he did not like parental feuds. His view was that 'I do not like when my parents quarrel. I used to be more traumatised last year but now I am learning to cope with it'.

For Trudy, her worries lay in her relationship with her mother. One day she had been upset about an incident at home which had bothered her throughout the school day. She reported that she was having a problem with her mother who had 'put her out' the night before. Trudy had consequently slept out that night and had come to school not having a meal that morning. She also did not have any lunch that day and needed some money to go back home. In speaking to the mother about the incident, her view was that Trudy had spoken to her rudely using unacceptable language and had refused to apologise to her, this was why she had put her out:

She had the guts to sleep out, not even willing to approach me to apologise or come in. You think she would come to knock on the door. She stayed outside instead. Not with me she bringing her rudeness.

Parent interview extract

Trudy's mother noted that although she had an 'okay' relationship with her daughter, Trudy was becoming a major concern for the family as she was a 'rude child' with a 'split personality'. Tensions at home like these almost certainly affected Trudy's participation in lessons. For instance, with regards to this incident, she was very worried about how to get home that day and about her subsequent relationship with her mother. Hence, like Sam and Petra, Trudy sometimes drifted away from her work at school in reflecting on the issues happening at home.

The above findings show that, for Petra, Sam and Trudy, the problems created by their home environment could very well make it difficult for them to

concentrate at school, resulting in disengagement. However, in response to home circumstances as well as emotional and social tensions, the core informants tended to manifest a form of quiet disengagement, such as mental withdrawal. In contrast, other researchers have suggested that these home factors may engender more extreme forms of disengagement. For instance, Furlong (1991) has argued that students' disaffection may be a response to the dual emotional demands placed on them by social and educational structures. Thus, some students who may already be emotionally vulnerable from the constraints placed on them by other non-school experiences, particularly in the home and among peers, may also face emotional injuries from the demands of school. This double emotional tension may cause students to respond in deviant ways, such as challenging the teachers' authority or rejecting school (p. 298-306). However, this did not seem to be the case here.

The importance of home background in generating forms of disengagement has been highlighted by other researchers too. For example, Steinberg (1996) suggested that, for particular students, their disengagement is related more to the conditions of their lives outside of school than to what takes place within the school walls. Likewise, Rudduck and Flutter (2000) contend that many young people find themselves involved in complex relationships and situations outside of the school context and some of them are accustomed to levels of responsibility and autonomy that they are denied within school (p. 86). Similarly, Dwyer and Wyn (2001) argued that young people are much more than students; for many of them the other aspects of their lives are even more important to them; hence their lives out of school can significantly affect the effort that they place on their lessons. Within the UK, the importance of home factors has also been identified by Pollard and Filer (1999, 2007). In their view, 'home factors (including forms of economic, social, cultural and emotional capital) were also enduring and could become very significant particularly

at crisis points' (2007: 447) especially in the case of students from working-class backgrounds. Moreover, with regards to the US, Marks (2000) has acknowledged that students' disengagement is related to their low socioeconomic status. In this regard, Smyth (2006) argued that understanding other aspects of students' lives, including the debilitating home lives of non-middle class pupils, can shed light on the complexity of their school disengagement.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on how the home backgrounds of the core informants influenced their levels of engagement at school and the kinds of disengagement they displayed. The low incomes and poor housing of many of the working-class families had the most obvious effect. For example, they often lacked sufficient funds to purchase the required text books for use at school, or to provide meals, including lunch, for their children, which may imply that there was a possibility of them being undernourished. Furthermore, the core informants did not always have the bus fare to get to school and were therefore either late or absent. Additionally, some parents had financial priorities which affected their ability to provide the material resources to facilitate their children's learning. This material deprivation meant that the students sometimes struggled to follow the lesson or understand the lesson content. During these times when they were present the core informants flooded out of their lessons and engaged in forms of mental withdrawal, such as sleeping or thinking about home issues. In terms of their cultural circumstances, the core informants' parents often lacked the necessary cultural and educational resources to facilitate their children's learning. Thus, there was limited

parental involvement with school, and a relative lack of home support for learning. Some of the core informants also experienced recurrent tensions at home which may have resulted in their becoming unfocused in lessons.

The negative impact of poverty on school outcomes was evident in this study, and is still very much a harsh reality in other developing countries too. However, the findings revealed that the kinds of disengagement it generates are not necessarily of the kind implied by some previous studies. These suggested that such deviance may take an extreme form such as disruptive behaviour and truancy. However, despite the problems experienced at home, my core informants' disengagement at school took on more quiet forms.

There was a tendency in much UK research on classroom deviance and disengagement from the 1970s onwards to focus exclusively on school factors and to neglect the role of home background. However, I have shown that in the context of St Lucia, material and cultural circumstances at home can significantly affect students' classroom behaviour, in the manner documented in the literature for both developing and developed countries. The implication is that in order to gain a richer understanding of students' disengagement, it is necessary to consider the diverse contextual factors that may interact to shape their behaviour. In this regard, Pollard and Filer (2007) argued that 'learner engagement within secondary school is increasingly embedded with wider spheres of social activity' (p. 447). Furthermore, they contended that home, school and peer group factors all interact to influence students' learner identity as part of their wider construction of themselves as they move through their adolescent years (p. 444).

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

I began this thesis by noting that student disengagement has increasingly been recognised as a major educational problem, not just in the minority but also in the majority world. In the course of my discussion I have explored this issue through a study of a secondary school in St Lucia. My aim has been both to contribute to the general literature on disengagement, and to open up the field of research on schools in that society. This final chapter presents a summary of the findings and in so doing seeks to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the thesis. It also outlines some of the implications and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

9.1 Summary of Findings

My research questions were concerned with the nature of student disengagement, the different forms it takes, and the various factors that shape it. In an effort to explore these issues I reviewed the literature on disengagement in the psychological and sociological fields. This literature shows that disengagement is not an issue restricted to schools in Western societies but has become an increasingly important issue in countries worldwide. Within the psychological literature, there are diverse characterisations of disengagement, in terms of disaffection, indiscipline, maladaptive behaviour, misbehaviour or withdrawal. There was also considerable variation in how this phenomenon was explained, with appeal being made to a range of factors, most notably individual differences, for example in

terms of personality, family background and peer group association or membership. The sociological literature offered somewhat different approaches to understanding student disengagement. These focused on students' resistance, participation in subcultures and their adaptations to school as well as their perspectives and strategies in the classroom. The lack of consistency in the meaning given to 'disengagement', and the problems of documenting or measuring the phenomena, were frequently acknowledged in the literature, but without much progress towards a resolution. In an attempt to address this issue I proposed the re-conceptualisation of disengagement by using and developing Goffman's work on the interaction order as a lens with which to analyse classroom behaviour.

Much of the research on disengagement in the field of psychology employed a quantitative approach, seeking to measure disengagement, disaffection or similar terms via structured observation in a large number of schools, and/or through attitude questionnaires. By contrast, most of the relevant work in sociology has adopted a qualitative approach, often in the form of ethnography. This was the research methodology I adopted because it allowed me to explore first-hand what people did and said in particular contexts, to uncover the complexity of student disengagement, and to explore specific contextual factors which might engender forms of disengagement. Ethnographic data was collected from various sources and the data corpus was analysed using a form of grounded theorising adapted from Charmaz (2006).

The first research question sought to explore the various ways in which disengagement was manifested. Disengagement was re-conceptualised in terms of a partial or total withdrawal of attention from the main lesson as it is unfolding. This could occur for a short or for a sustained period, and might involve concurrent

engagement in acts that contravene classroom or school rules. The conceptual framework I developed revealed patterns of quiet and disruptive disengagement, these being treated as separate categories. Quiet disengagement consisted of those forms of deviant act that were unobtrusive, including mental withdrawal (sleeping, daydreaming, staring); physical withdrawal (truanting and school absence, skipping lessons); note writing; low level chatting and engagement in non-disruptive alternative activities. Disruptive disengagement referred to those deviant acts that disrupted the flow of the lesson or had the potential to do so. These behaviours included noisy behaviour of various kinds: joking; loud talking; quarrels; making comments; different types of calling out and questioning the teacher along with challenging the teacher's authority.

Perhaps the most important finding was that disengagement is not an isolated act reflecting the characteristics of individual students but rather is a complicated social process and is subject to much variation in character. The findings showed that most forms of quiet disengagement were committed individually while most disruptive acts were collective acts. However, personal interest in the subject or topic being taught as well as teacher reprimand could cause students previously engaged in collective acts of disengagement to abandon the group and flood back into the main lesson. Furthermore, the complexity of disengagement was seen in students' engagement in selective acts which, while occurring within the main lesson, disrupted its flow or had the potential to do so. Such acts included calling out to as well as questioning the teacher.

It is possible that students who generally manifested quiet forms of behaviour across various classroom contexts, would under certain circumstances engage in disruptive disengagement. It was also possible for particular students to

engage predominantly in a limited type of behaviour across a wide range of contexts which may be the basis for the development of a general adaptation to learning or school. Alternatively, such behaviour may be a strategy adopted by students to avoid certain negative labels among peers or to gain informal status within the classroom. Additionally, it was seen that although the study was not primarily concerned with gender differences, it did reveal that forms of disruptive disengagement were manifested mostly by boys while forms of quiet disengagement were distributed across both sexes. Furthermore, the level of disengagement overall was greater for boys than for girls, which is in keeping with the earlier literature.

The second research question was concerned with identifying the factors which may engender forms of disengagement, and here I drew on the detailed information I had about the experiences of eight core informants. The study examined the role of three key factors contributing to levels of students' disengagement and the forms that it took: teacher behaviour, peer relations, and home background. In Chapter Six, it was demonstrated that students' disengagement was derived in part from their assessment of particular situations, primarily as regards the teacher's behaviour. Students ascribed meanings to teachers' actions based on assessment criteria concerned with how the ideal teacher ought to behave. When teachers did not live up to these expectations, students often responded by withdrawing their attention from particular lessons and manifesting various forms of disengagement.

Students assessed their teachers in terms of a number of dimensions: quality of instruction, personality, and ability to exercise discipline. Students' assessment of the quality of instruction seemed to relate to the pitching of the

lessons, so that the demands were too great or pace too quick, as well as lack of variation in lesson activities and teaching methods. Their assessment of teacher personality included specific complaints about lack of enthusiasm, inability to make lessons interesting, perceived rudeness and lack of respect, as well as unfairness. Evaluations of teachers' ability to exercise discipline included criticisms of teachers' inability to curb the noise and disorder in a class, to deal with students effectively, and to command their attention. Here, teachers were categorised as soft or strict, and the actions of teachers perceived to be soft often provoked disengagement on the part of students. While students were able to identify specific aspects of teachers' behaviour that they disapproved of they often drew on all three aspects of teachers' behaviour in judging the success of their lessons. For instance, Olive's notion of a lesson that she liked was one where the teacher was perceived to be 'nice, strict, helpful, encouraging and easy to relate to'.

Another key finding was that while the students' assessment of their teachers was a crucial factor in shaping patterns of engagement and disengagement, considerable contingency was involved. A negative estimate of a teacher on one or more of these dimensions did not automatically lead to disengagement. Thus, students did not always disengage in lessons taught by teachers perceived to be soft; and there were times when students criticised the teacher or the lesson but remained engaged. This suggests that students also take into consideration other factors in their assessment of the classroom situation. For instance, they sometimes attributed teachers' ineptitude to the misbehaviour of fellow students. Alternatively, they remained engaged in lessons otherwise considered to be boring when the subject was perceived to be important in terms of their future goals or interests.

Peer relations were also a salient factor that impacted on students' disengagement at school. Four patterns of peer relations among the core informants were explored. These included a) strong peer relations within school but weak relations out of school b) strong peer relations both in and out of school c) weak relations in school but strong relations out of school and d) weak peer relations both in and out of school. The opportunity to socialise in school was quite significant for students who did not have much contact with peers outside. Thus, here disengagement tended to take the form of chatting, laughing and having fun. However, the nature of students' socialising varied. Some students persistently sought opportunities to chat during most lessons, whereas others restricted socialising to recess times and to lessons when the teacher was absent.

The forms of disengagement also varied among the core informants who maintained weak peer relations at school. Thus, although they all mentally withdrew from their lessons much of the time, for two students the common practice was sustained sleeping while the other student found herself daydreaming or staring around. Where weak peer relations were accompanied by peer disapproval or rejection, students had the potential to become disruptive in lessons when provoked. In extreme cases, weak peer relations had the potential to lead to physical withdrawal from the lesson and from school so as to socialise with non-school peers.

My research also revealed that, for particular students, home background factors had a profound impact on their level of engagement at school, and the types of disengagement they adopted. Of the eight core informants, two came from middle income homes and six from families considered to be low income. Of those from low income homes, three core informants had home circumstances that were

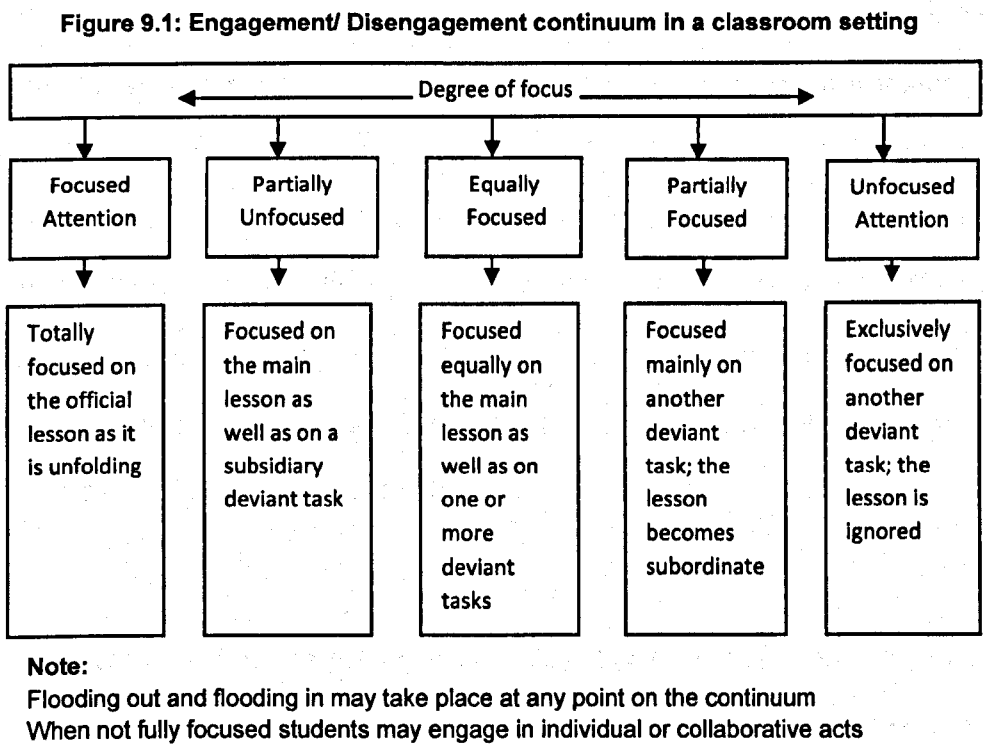
important in engendering forms of disengagement. They had poor living conditions which reflected the inability of parental income to sustain their families. In addition, parental priorities sometimes reduced further the provision of necessary material and educational resources for these children. Thus, these students lacked the required textbooks, and often did not have money for meals and bus fares. They also lacked places at home to do homework, as well as additional educational resources, such as books, to facilitate their learning. In addition to being materially and culturally deprived, tensions at home (either parental feuds or parent-child difficulties) added to the problems students experienced at home and thus increased the likelihood of disengagement. Generally speaking, however, the core informants engaged in forms of quiet disengagement, such as physical or mental withdrawal. For example, students were absent or late when home conditions were bad or found themselves drifting away in lessons thinking about home issues and how conditions could be better.

9.2 Contribution to Research

My research has focused on exploring the nature of disengagement, the different forms it takes, and the various factors that engender it. In particular, I have been concerned with contributing to a theoretical understanding of the complexity of student disengagement as a process. Much past research has been characterised by definitional and measurement problems. My aim here has been to overcome the theoretical and methodological limitations of previous psychological and sociological approaches to disengagement. In particular, this study has added to the understanding of disengagement within a symbolic interactionist perspective. This

approach emphasises people's strategies in particular contexts as opposed to assuming that people have fixed characteristics which determine their behaviour.

Drawing on the work of Goffman, I attempted to develop a more fruitful way of conceptualising disengagement, recognising its diverse forms and complexity. Here, disengagement is conceived in terms of withdrawal from the main lesson and concurrent engagement in deviant acts. Figure 9.1 below summarises this way of looking at disengagement.



The above diagram lays out the extent to which students' behaviour is perceived as engaged or disengaged depending on the direction of their main focus of attention. Thus, students' behaviour can range from fully engaged, where their attention is focused entirely on the lesson, to disengaged behaviours where their attention is focused on some alternative, deviant activity. Moreover, I have sought to identify various concrete behaviours which amounted to forms of quiet and disruptive

disengagement. In this regard, this study contributes to the analysis of subtypes of disengagement.

Equally important, the research has explored the causes of disengagement, thereby hopefully providing a better platform for policies to deal with indiscipline in schools in the Caribbean. This is important given growing concern over the provision of quality secondary education for all in the Caribbean (Leacock, 2009:31). It has potential implications for the recent implementation of universal secondary education in St Lucia (in 2006), incorporating students who traditionally have not qualified to enter secondary school. As a result of this change, there has been increased student disengagement, adding to the challenges facing the teaching of mixed ability groups in Eastern Caribbean countries' (Leacock, 2009:29, 31)⁵⁰. Increased numbers of students have been reported to be 'either dropping out or becoming apathetic while biding their time until they can leave school legally' (Leacock, 2009:29). Hopefully, my research will facilitate the development of kinds of instructional, academic and social support that are needed to help diminish or reverse the cycle of disengagement in the Eastern Caribbean.

My research has particular importance because there has been little empirical work, and indeed hardly any ethnographic research, in the smaller islands of the Eastern Caribbean, particularly as regards disengagement. This study has therefore explored new ground. Indeed, there have been few educational ethnographies carried out in Eastern Caribbean schools.⁵¹ My study therefore

⁵⁰ See Evans (1985) for a discussion of the nature, development and challenges of mixed ability groupings within a UK context.

⁵¹ The only major one has been Hyacinth Evans' study, which was undertaken in the larger Caribbean country of Jamaica. And her work focused on the relationship between academic achievement and the schooling and education of adolescents, rather than on disengagement specifically.

makes a methodological contribution to the body of educational ethnographic work in the Caribbean. However, the theoretical and methodological issues it addresses have much wider relevance: they apply wherever student disengagement occurs and is treated as an important educational issue.

9.3 Implications of the Research

In this thesis I have focused on patterns of behaviour in the classroom. Hence, I have not been identifying certain students who are always quiet or disruptive but rather looking at students' behaviour. In other words, my focus is on how students' disengagement is influenced by the social contexts in which they interact rather than on how their psychological attributes contribute to their disengagement. Indeed, it is possible for individuals who are quiet in many contexts to manifest disruptive disengagement in other situations, and vice versa. Moreover, even in the case of Olive, who seemed to be quiet across all contexts at school and home, I have not assumed that this was simply a product of her personality. Instead, I looked at how her behaviour was related to the particular contexts that she was in. Like the rest of the informants, she adjusted to particular classroom situations. What this suggests is that any policy designed to reduce disengagement cannot operate solely on individual students but must take account of the role that institutional arrangements, and community and home environments, play. Therefore, this research underscores the importance of understanding students' experiences (attitude, behaviour, feelings) in various contexts instead of seeing disengagement as a maladaptive behaviour and ascribing it to psychological problems inherent in the individual.

As I noted in the Introduction, it has been a common perception that students in the Caribbean are highly motivated, and that discipline in schools is strict, so that there is little problem of disengagement, by comparison with the situation in the UK. However, as I have indicated, the situation is changing and it has become much more of a problem in recent times. Yet, most students at Southall still had a general positive orientation towards education, and most of the disengagement took quiet rather than loud and disruptive forms. By contrast, research in the UK has suggested that students who persistently disengage demonstrate a strong dislike for school (Laurent, 2008:40-47). They treat school simply as a 'condition of existence' (Brown, 1987) or as a legal requirement (Broadhurst et al., 2005). This apparent contrast in the orientations of disengaged students in the UK and the Caribbean reinforces the point that the process of disengagement is complex and situationally variable. Moreover, disengagement is not simply a response to classroom situations or even a function of institutional or home factors only, but is compounded by the influence of wider socio-political factors as well.

At the same time, my findings also highlighted some similarities with previous disengagement-related literature review as well as my previous pilot study carried out at a state secondary school in the UK. In general terms, students' strategies (as seen in the manifestation of specific forms of disengagement) and students' perspectives (seen in their evaluations) have parallel those documented in studies of British working-class students. Likewise, this study lends support to findings from my pilot study indicating that students' experiences as well as their social relations in the home, school and community can influence their commitment to school and learning, the level of effort they put into their academic tasks and thus their degree of engagement/disengagement at school (Laurent, 2008).

9.4 Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

The research was conducted in a single research site and I was only able to focus on some of the classes and teachers in the school. Furthermore, my in-depth investigation was limited to eight students. While I believe that the study captures patterns of disengagement occurring in the school more generally, and provides a basis for understanding the factors shaping them, there is clearly scope for further work on this topic, both within St Lucia and elsewhere in the Caribbean.

Certainly, the findings will not necessarily be applicable to other Eastern Caribbean countries. This is due to the marked differences among this chain of islands, in terms of their recent history and colonial pasts, predominant languages, and their different stages of economic development as well as the nature of their education systems. In view of this, it is suggested that exploratory research needs to be conducted in the other territories to gain an understanding both of the commonalities and the variations as regards student disengagement. This research would pave the way for elucidating the role of disengagement in the long term development of student academic success in the Caribbean.

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APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL APPROVAL

1a. Tentative Ethical Approval of Research

From: J.M.Oates [mailto:J.M.Oates@open.ac.uk]
Sent: 24 March 2009 11:23
To: U.Laurent
Cc: Research-ethics@open.ac.uk
Subject: RE: Ethics application #565

Dear Uthel Laurent,

Thank you for this revised application.

Can you please clarify whether 'school' in the following extract from the Data Protection field in your completed proforma refers to the school in which your research will be based or to FELS?

All data will be transferred as soon as possible to the school server and will be accessed by VPN. I have already gained approval from AACS and have access to the school's server via VPN access card.

Apart from this single query, your application is well prepared and once you have answered this I can send it for review.

John Oates

Chair, HPMEC

1b. Complete Ethical Approval of Research

From: J.M.Oates [mailto:J.M.Oates@open.ac.uk]

Sent: 24 April 2009 18:20

To: U.Laurent

Cc: Research-ethics@open.ac.uk

Subject: RE: Ethic Application #565

Dear Uthel Laurent,

Thank you for this revised document, which is much improved.

I confirm that your ethics approval is now complete.

I hope that the research goes well.

John Oates

Chair, HPMEC

APPENDIX 2: LETTERS AND CONSENT FORMS

2a. Permission to Conduct Research in St. Lucia

Dear xxxx

Re: Research on student learning experience

As a PhD student at The Open University, I am asking for your consent to conduct research at a school in St. Lucia for my thesis for a period of two months from April 26th to June 25th, 2010. This study will examine students' participation in learning and involvement in school and will benefit both students and teachers in the future by giving teachers more information to help them understand student attitudes, behaviour and motives in school. Ultimately, this will allow teachers to be better able to assist students more fully with their learning. The focus is mainly on student learning rather than on teachers or teaching practices.

Please find attached a copy of my research proposal for your perusal. If you have any further queries about the project do not hesitate to contact me using the details below.

Thank you for your anticipated support in this survey. I would be grateful for favourable response from you.

Yours sincerely,

Uthel Laurent

2b. Letters to Teachers

(i) Permission to Conduct Research: Phase One

Dear teacher,

As a PhD student at The Open University, I am asking for your consent to observe a few of your Year Nine class sessions. I would also like to conduct interviews with you for my research project. This study will examine students' participation in learning and involvement in school and will benefit both students and teachers in the future by giving teachers more information to help them understand student attitudes, behaviour and motives in school. Ultimately, this will allow teachers to be better able to assist students more fully with their learning. The focus is strictly on student learning and your decision to participate or not to participate in this study will in no way affect your employment status.

If you consent to me observing your lessons, you will be consenting to me taking notes of your class sessions and to having a few of the lessons recorded. If you consent to be interviewed you will be taking part in an hour long audio taped interview. During the interview you will be asked some questions about your views and insights into students' behaviours and attitudes towards learning and school in general. During the interview you do not have to answer any questions you think that are too personal or that you are uncomfortable with. I will remind you during the interview that you are being recorded and if at any time during the interview you want me to turn off the tape recorder I will do so. Like the class observation, only my supervisors will have access to the tapes or transcripts. I will keep the tapes until I have completed my study and then I will erase them.

If you consent to participating in this research, you have the right to confidentiality. I will not use your real name or name of your school in my research and will refer to you with a pseudonym in all my notes and in my thesis. Additionally, you have the right to read the final transcripts of my tape recorded observations and can omit any part that you are uncomfortable with. You also have the right to ask me any questions you have about the research study, and, can request a summary or a copy of the results of the research at the end of the study.

If you have any questions about the study, during or after the research, please contact me at the details below or my supervisors:

_____ (name) _____
(contact)

_____ (name) _____
(contact)

By signing this document, you are showing that you have been informed of what it means to participate in this study, you have read this document, you have had all your questions answered, and you fully agree to participate in this study. I will collect the signed consent on _____ (Date)

Thank you for your anticipated support in this study.

Yours sincerely

Uthel Laurent

✕.....

| | | |
|-------|-----------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name | Signature | Date |

(ii) *Permission to Conduct Research in St. Lucia: Phase Two*

Dear teacher,

Re: Lesson Observation

In this second phase of my research I will be focusing on the learning experiences of specific students (with parental approval) and would like to observe these students in lessons during the period May 4th, 2010 – June 18th, 2010. In particular, I will be observing how they behave in your lessons as well as how they participate in various learning activities; I would like to observe them in a variety of learning activities whether test, practical, demonstration, instruction, discussion, oral or class exercise.

In this regard, I will be following them around for the entire day and will be with them in most of their lessons as I would like to observe them in their natural learning environment without drawing any unnecessary attention to them. Please inform me if you do not want me to observe any particular lesson of yours. Otherwise, a non-response from you would indicate your approval.

Thank you for your anticipated cooperation and support in this research.

Yours sincerely,

Uthel Laurent

✂.....

I wish/do not wish to take part in this project (Delete as appropriate)

| | | |
|-------|-----------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name | Signature | Date |

2c. Letters to Parents

(i) Letters to Year Nine Parents

Re: Survey on student learning experience

Dear parent/guardian/carer,

As a Ph.D. student at The Open University, I am asking for your consent for your child to complete a short questionnaire for a research project I am conducting for my thesis. This questionnaire will seek to obtain the views of Year Nine students on their participation in their learning and involvement in school as well as related experiences inside and outside of school.

This questionnaire is the first phase of my research project. Since it would be impracticable for me to study every Year Nine student in depth, ten students from the Year Nine group will be invited to further participate in the second phase of the project to get a more in-depth study of their learning experience. The choice of these students will not be based on their level of academic ability or any other competences. Rather, I will be attempting to get a range of students' experiences and opinions. I will of course again seek student and parental permission to participate in the second phase of the project.

This research will benefit both students and teachers in the future by giving teachers more information to help them understand student attitudes, behaviour and motives in school. Ultimately, this will allow teachers to be better able to assist students more fully with their learning.

The responses of the questionnaire will be kept strictly confidential and will not be seen by any staff member at the school. Furthermore, any information entered on the questionnaire will be used for research purposes only and your child's identity will under no circumstances, be disclosed. Completing the questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes, and every completed questionnaire is valuable to my research. Whether or not you decide to allow your child to participate will have no effect on your child's grades or class status.

Please indicate whether you are prepared to allow your child to complete the questionnaire by signing the consent form below. Forms should be returned to the school's main office by(Date). Unless the form is returned, your child will not be able to take part in the survey.

If you have any further queries about the project do not hesitate to contact me using the contact details below.

Thank you for your anticipated support in this survey.

Yours sincerely,

Uthel Laurent

PARENT/ GUARDIAN CONSENT

| | | |
|---------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of Child | Signature of parent/guardian/carer | Date |

(ii) Parental Permission for Form Three Lesson Observation

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am Mrs. Uthel Laurent, a former secondary school teacher in St. Lucia. I am presently doing a project on students' experiences of learning in secondary school. In particular, I am interested in how students in Form Three learn during lessons and how they are involved in the school. I will be looking at some of the lessons that the students take part in and will be talking to a few students. However, I will not use students' names in the project and will not share the information that they give me with anyone. If you do not want your child to be a part of this project please indicate this by signing the form below. Please return the form **only** if you **do not** want your child to participate. Otherwise, I will take it that you have given your permission. If you want further information about the project please contact me at Mobile _____

X.....

I do not give permission for my child to take part in this project

Parent/Guardian Signature

2d. Information Booklet and Consent Forms - Informants

(i) *Information Booklet: An investigation into the learning experiences of adolescents*

What is the project about?

This project will explore the learning and schooling experiences of adolescent students. In particular, it will focus on your experience of your learning and your involvement in school.

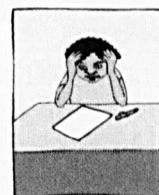


What type of information will be collected?

Information about your learning experiences will be collected from observations, conversations and individual interviews. Information will be collected from other sources such as pieces of written class work, learning logs or diaries, certificates and achievement records. In addition, you will be invited to talk about your views of your learning and your feelings about your secondary school experience.

How will the information be collected?

The information needed for the research will be collected on the school premises during normal school hours. You will be observed in some lessons; however, this will not be done on a daily basis. During these lesson observations some notes will be taken about how you learn.



A few of your lessons may also be audio recorded with the permission of parent(s) or guardian(s) or carer(s) and you will be informed in advanced before any recordings are done. No one else but the researcher and supervisors will have access to the audio recordings, which will be erased when the project is completed.

You will also be invited to talk about your experience of school and to give your opinion of your learning experiences during an individual interview. This interview will last for approximately thirty minutes.



During the interview, you do not have to answer any questions you think that are too personal or that you are uncomfortable with. The audio recordings of the interview will be kept until the end of the project and will then be erased.

At any time during the interview you can request that the recorder be turned off. If you do not wish to continue with the interview, you can make this request any time during the interview.

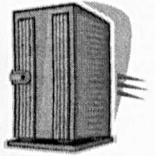


In addition to the lesson observations and individual interview, other information about your learning experience will be collected from your teachers and other school staff.

You do not have to feel stressed about the project and you are not expected to behave any differently from the way you normally do.

Will the information be confidential?

All information about your identity will be kept confidential and all data that you provide will be made anonymous. Your real name or the name of the school will not be included in the final report or any published work.



In addition, the data that you provide will not be shown or given to anyone else except the supervisor and will only be used for the purpose stated. This means that the information that you will give will not be disclosed to the Head teacher, Form Tutor, Head of Department, staff member or any other person without your consent.

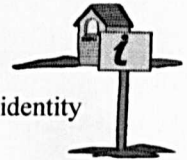
Any notes to be made as well as the other non computerised information to be collected will be kept in a locked cupboard and taken from the school at the end of the school day. This information will be stored in a locked cupboard at the Open University and will only be accessible by the researcher and her supervisors. All computerised information will then be transferred to the Open University's (OU) server as soon as possible.



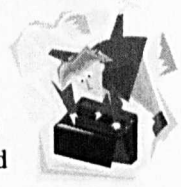
You have the right to read the final accounts of the observation notes as well as the interview transcripts and to omit any part that you are uncomfortable with.

How will the information collected about me be used and handled?

The processing of the data will be done using pseudonyms. This means that your identity will not be disclosed to anyone under any circumstances.



When handling the information that is collected about you, the researcher will follow the OU Data Protection Code of Conduct. This is a guide which advises how to treat personal and other types of information that you give about yourself. This is to avoid loss, theft or destruction of your information. The guide also recommends that your information should not be given out to any unauthorized persons.



The researcher will also follow The OU Research Ethical Guidelines as well as the British Education Research Association Ethical Guidelines. Throughout the research project the researcher will follow The Open University and other professional research guidelines and will conduct herself in a professional way.

How do I become involved in the project?

It would not be practical for the researcher to ask everyone in your year to participate in the project, and so she will invite a small number of students, including you, to take part. A selection has been made to include a range of students who have interesting things to say about their experiences of school and learning more generally.



It is entirely up to you to decide whether you want to participate in the project. You will be given a week to think about this. If you decide that you want to participate then you will seek permission from your parent(s), guardian (s) or carer(s), who will then complete and return the consent form provided. You will also need to complete and return a consent form as well.

Will I be informed of the result of the project?

You can request a summary or copy of the results of the project at the end of the study. This report will be made available via email or by posting it to your school.



Can I withdraw from the project at any time?

You will be taking part in this project voluntarily and you have the right to withdraw from the project at any time. There will no negative consequences if you do not wish to continue with the project. Whether or not you take part in the project, there will be no negative effects on your class grade, your school performance or class status.

Can I request that the information held about me be destroyed?

You have the right to access to any information that is collected and held about you. You can also request that this information be destroyed six months after the completion of the project.



Who can I contact if I have any queries?

If you would like further information about the project you can speak to the researcher. Her contact details are as follows:

Uthel Laurent
Level 3, Stuart Hall Building,
Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA,
Tel: _____ Mobile: _____
E mail: u.laurent@open.ac.uk



If I cannot resolve matters with the researcher what other source of help is available?

If you, your parent(s),guardian(s) or carer(s) feel uncomfortable in discussing any issue with the researcher you can contact her supervisors who can answer any questions or clarify any issues. Their contact details are as follows:



| | |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| _____ | _____ |
| Name of Supervisor (1) | Contact details |
| _____ | _____ |
| Name of Supervisor (2) | Contact details |

(ii) Accompanying Letter for Informants' Parent/Guardian

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am Mrs. Uthel Laurent, a research student at the Open University, whose previous career was as a teacher in St. Lucia. I am presently conducting an investigation into the learning experiences of students. Your child has been selected to participate in this project. Please find enclosed an information booklet which will detail the purpose and nature of the research as well as explaining how the information collected about your child will be used and handled.

Please indicate whether you are prepared to allow your child to participate in the project by signing in the consent form provided. Forms should be returned to the home room teacher at the end of the week. Unless the form is returned, your child will not be able to participate in the project.

Should you have any further queries about the project do not hesitate to contact me using the contact details outlined in the information booklet provided.

Thank you for your anticipated support in this project.

Yours sincerely

Uthel Laurent

(iii) Parental Consent Form

I..... **(Name of Parent/Guardian)** agree to allow my child to take part in the research project. I have been given information about the aim and purpose of the research. I have been informed that my child may refuse to participate by simply saying so or by completing a withdrawal form which should be handed in to the home room teacher in a sealed envelope. I have been assured that my child's confidentiality will be protected as well as how information collected will be used and handled as explained and specified in the booklet and letter. I agree that information that my child provides can be used for educational or research purposes including publication. I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact **(Name of Researcher)** at **(Mobile or E mail)**. If I want to talk to someone else about the project, I can contact the researcher's supervisor **(Name of Supervisor)** at **(Telephone or E mail)**.

(iv) Informant Consent Form

I **(Name of student)** agree to take part in the research project. I have had the purpose of the research explained to me. I have been informed that I may refuse to participate by simply saying so or by filling in a withdrawal form which should be handed to my home room teacher. I have been assured that my confidentiality will be protected as explained in the booklet and letter. The researcher has explained to me about data protection. I agree that the information that I provide can be used for educational or research purposes including publication. I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact **(Name of Researcher)** at **(Mobile or E mail)**. If I want to talk to someone else about the project, I can contact the researcher's supervisor **(Name of Supervisor)** at **(Telephone or E mail)**.

APPENDIX 3: SURVEYS AND LEARNING LOG

3a. Teacher Questionnaire

Dear teacher,

As part of my research, I would be grateful if you would complete this short questionnaire which would be very useful to me in the analysis of my data. Please be aware that you do not have to disclose your name or gender and the information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential. If you would prefer to complete an electronic questionnaire please supply me with a valid email address where I can send the document. Alternatively, if you would wish to talk to me at an interview instead I would be happy to arrange one at your convenience. I would appreciate your honesty in completing this questionnaire. Thank you for taking the time out to help me in my research. Please return the completed questionnaire to me by (Date).

A: ABOUT YOUR PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

1. How long have you been teaching at this school?
2. What are your main roles at this school?
3. What was your profession before employment at this school?

B: ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

1. Do you have any knowledge of the history of the school? If so please let me provide me with some information on the history of your school as you know it? What do you think is the perception of the school that is held by the public?
2. Can you tell me about the kinds of students that attend this school generally?
3. What is the catchment area of the school, that is, how far do the students travel to attend this school?

C: ABOUT YOUR TEACHING

1. What was/is your motivation for teaching? (What made you decide to become a teacher?)
2. What are the exciting bits that you enjoy about teaching?
3. Are there any aspects of teaching that you do not enjoy? Tell me about these aspects
4. What are your expectations of the students when you teach your lessons?
5. What does the term student engagement means to you?

6. What do you do if you realise that the students are not showing any interest in a particular lesson that you are teaching?
7. Are there particular students who are disengaged (not engaged) in your lessons? If so, tell me about the behaviour of these students

D: ABOUT THE STUDENTS

1. Which of the Form Three groups (3B, 3E, 3S, 3T) do you teach and what subject(s) do you teach them?
2. How would you describe the Form Three students that you teach generally?
3. If you teach more than one group of students how would you compare the behaviour of particular groups of students?
4. Is there any student in each of the Form Three groups that you teach who is a problem for you? If so what is the nature of the problem? Can you describe the behaviour of these particular students? Please tell me about each child in terms of personality, attitude, behaviour in class, learning ability, general comportment, in or out of school issues, performance, achievements, success, failures etc.

E: OPTIONAL QUESTIONS

1. How do you take the students' need into account in your teaching?
2. What support do you get from the administration of your school for your teaching?
3. What do you think is/are the most important attribute(s) of a good teacher?

Thank you for taking the time out to give me an insight into the school, your professional history and the students that you teach. This information would be vital to me in the analysis of research data on students' learning.

3b. Student Questionnaire

A survey of students' experience of learning and schooling

INTRODUCTION

Dear Student,

As a PhD research student I would like to find out your views on your learning and schooling experience. This survey is part of my research which seeks to explore adolescent students' participation in their learning and involvement in school. Please select the answer that most clearly reflects your views. This is a completely personal survey. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and will not be seen by any teachers or staff. Whether you choose to answer this questionnaire or not will not affect your class grades or class standing. Furthermore, any information entered on the questionnaire will be used for research purposes only and your identity will, under no circumstances, be disclosed. Completing the questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes, and every completed questionnaire is valuable to my research. I appreciate the time and effort in completing this questionnaire.

INSTRUCTIONS

For each statement in this section of the survey, please indicate whether you strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD), or are undecided (U). Then put a tick [✓] in the box that best matches your personal view. Read each statement very carefully as every statement is different.

| | | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----|---|-------------------|-------|-----------|----------|----------------------|
| Q1 | I work very hard on my school work. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q2 | I am pretty smart in school. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q3 | My guardian(s) or parent(s) has (have) time to hear about what happens to me in school. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q4 | I find that my class work is interesting. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q5 | My teachers care about how I perform at school. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q6 | When I am with my guardian(s) or parent(s) I feel ignored. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q7 | I do not pay attention in class. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q8 | I can work really hard in school. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q9 | I am worried about what other students think of me. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q10 | Doing well in school is important to me. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q11 | My teachers have high expectations of me at school. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q12 | When I am with my classmates I feel happy. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q13 | I stay focused on my class tasks during lessons. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q14 | I work in lessons where I like the subject. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q15 | My guardian(s) or parent(s) is (are) interested in what I do at school. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q16 | I am not bothered about my performance in class tests. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Q17 | My teachers are unfair with me. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q18 | I am proud of who I am. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q19 | I complete my home work. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q20 | My guardian(s) or parent(s) does (do) a lot to support me at school | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q21 | Doing homework helps me to understand the subject. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q22 | I do not like to get low marks in my class work. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q23 | I feel happy when I am with my teachers. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q24 | I am prepared for my lessons. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q25 | I work well in lessons where I like the teacher. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q26 | My guardian(s) or parent(s) tries (try) to control everything I do at school. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q27 | I do not enjoy doing my homework. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q28 | My teachers think what I say is important. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |
| Q29 | When I perform poorly on a test, I make the necessary corrections. | SA [] | A [] | U [] | D [] | SD [] |

About You

The following questions will help me to understand how your opinions vary between different groups of students. Your answers will not be used to identify individual responses. Where necessary write in your response or tick the box that may apply to you.

- Q30 What is your name?
- Q31 What is your date of birth?/.....
(month /year)
- Q32 What form group are you in?
- Q33 What group are you in for your Mathematics lessons?
- Q34 What is your gender? MALE [] FEMALE []

Q35 Do you speak English as your first language? **YES []** **NO[]**

Q36 If no, what is your first language?

Q37 To which group do you consider that you belong?
Tick the one that best describes you.

Black

British []
Caribbean []
African []
Other []

None of these []

Please specify

Q38 Would you be willing to be contacted by the researcher in the future to participate further in this research? **YES []** **NO []**

Q39 Use the space provided to write any queries or comment that you may have about the questionnaire or to include any or additional information not included above.

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

This is the end of the questions. Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. Your answers will be used for research purposes only and will be kept confidential.

3c. Student Learning Log

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson/ Subject: _____ Period: _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Use this learning log to keep track of your learning, your response to what is taught as well as your reflections on your lesson. This learning log is a personal document and could contain your record of your experiences, thoughts, feelings and reflections, details of problems that you have encountered and solved and may have both positive and negative learning experiences (that is, what learning task that you enjoy and do not enjoy). Please be honest in writing your log.

- What did you do this lesson?

- What do you think about this lesson?

- What did you learn this lesson?

- Did it go well or badly? Why?

- How did you feel about this lesson?

- What have you learnt about yourself this lesson

- Do you have other thought ,feelings or comments

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

4a. Student Interview Schedule

List of broad questions to be asked

- Introduction:** Welcome informant
Brief reminder of ethical standards to be followed (confidentiality, data protection, withdrawal rights, use of data, etc)
- 1 What does coming to school mean to you? Tell me about your experiences of school-some things about do you not like about school or find displeasing and things that you like about this school
 - 2 Tell me about your lessons. How do you find your lessons generally? How do you feel about the way you are learning in your lessons? Tell about a lesson that you enjoy or do not like. Tell me what you do during a normal lesson? How do you prepare for your lessons or school at home?
 - 3 Tell me about your feelings towards school. Are there students are that more(less) enthusiastic about and committed to school than you do? Tell me about them. How do your friends feel about school/learning or their lessons?
 - 4 Tell me about other things that you enjoy doing besides coming to school. Do you take part in after school or other extra-curricular activities? How do you spend your afternoons/evenings after school?
 - 5 Have you been absence from or late to school this term? Tell me some of the reason why you have been absent from school.
 - 6 What do you want to do after you leave school? Do you think that school prepares you for your future career?
 - 7 Questions from informant
- Is there anything that you would like to ask me or that you want to add?
- Conclusion:** Pause to allow informant to make any additional comments
Thank informant

4b. Parent Interview Schedule

List of broad questions to be asked

Introduction: Greet parent

Brief reminder of ethical standards to be followed (confidentiality, data protection, withdrawal rights, use of data, etc)

- 1 What job do you do (your spouse does) for a living? Are you able to provide for your child education-school books, uniform, transportation, lunch, etc? Does your job prevent you from spending time with your child?
- 2 Is your child an only child or does he/she have any other siblings? If yes, do they live at home with you? Do they support in any way? Does the child's father/mother resides with him/her, supports the child financially, help with school/home work, spend time with the child
- 3 Tell be about your child schooling. Does your child like to come to school? Do you know what your child wants to become when he/she leaves school? Does your child attend school regularly and on time? If not why? To your knowledge does he/she have any problems/ concerns at school?
- 4 Do you insist that your child does his/her home work? How many hours do they spend on their home work after school that you enjoy or do not like? Tell me what activities your child does on an afternoon after school. Do you child belong to any community/church clubs/groups? Are they involved in any extracurricular activities at school? How does he/she prepare for your lessons or school at home? Do they go to bed/get up early?
- 5 Tell me about your child performance at school? Are you satisfied with his/her performance at school? Is there any problem that is currently affecting your child's performance at school? Are you able to help your child with home work or school work? Is your child frequently absent/late for school? If so what are the reasons for absence or lateness
- 6 Is there anything that you like/do not like about your child's school? How often do you visit the school? Do you attend any fund raising activities or other events held by the school?
- 7 Tell me about your relationship with your child-what type of person is he/she? Does your child help with house chores? Does he/she have any problems at home? Do you have any issues with your child at home?
- 8 Questions from parent(s)

Is there anything that you would like to ask me or that you want to add?

Conclusion: Pause to allow parent(s) to make any additional comments
Thank parent

APPENDIX 5: SOCIOMETRIC DATA

5a. Sociometric Test

CLASSROOM RELATIONSHIPS

| SECTION A | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | STATEMENT | CHOICE 1 | CHOICE 2 | CHOICE 3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Would like to have him/her as one of my best friends | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Would like to have him/her in my class but not as a close friend | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Would like to be with him/her once in a while but not often or for a long time | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't mind him/her being in our classroom, but I don't want to have anything to do with him/her | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Wish he/she weren't in our class | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |

| SECTION B | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | STATEMENT | CHOICE 1 | CHOICE 2 | CHOICE 3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Would most like to sit with or be with at lunch time | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Would most like to go to town with after school | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Would most like to work together with in a small group studying English | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Would choose to go to a movie with | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Like him/her the least | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |

| SECTION C | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|---|
| | STATEMENT | CHOICE 1 | CHOICE 2 | CHOICE 3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Stays calm | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Unhappy | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Selfish | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Shy | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Copycat | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Poor group member | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Rude to teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Lazy | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Loyal | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Bothers others | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Annoying | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Good leader | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Bully | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Shows off | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Disrespectful to teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Doesn't boast | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |

5b. Sociometric Nominations Received by Core Informants

| STATEMENT | NOMINATIONS | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|---|-------------------------|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | OLIVE | IRWIN | TRUDY | RUFUS | VELMA | SAM | PETRA | WAYNE |
| Stays calm | 7 | - | - | 3 | - | 14 | - | - |
| Unhappy | 3 | 4 | 11 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 | - |
| Selfish | - | 5 | - | 2 | 2 | 1 | - | 1 |
| Shy | 14 | 4 | 1 | 1 | - | 5 | - | - |
| Copycat | - | 4 | - | 9 | 1 | - | - | - |
| Poor group member | 7 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 3 |
| Rude to teachers | 1 | - | - | - | 10 | - | 16 | 1 |
| Lazy | 5 | 9 | 3 | 10 | - | - | 3 | 4 |
| Loyal | 4 | - | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | - |
| Bothers others | - | 4 | - | 5 | - | - | 1 | - |
| Annoying | - | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Good leader | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - |
| Bully | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | - | 5 | - |
| Shows off | - | 5 | - | - | 2 | - | - | 1 |
| Disrespectful to teachers | 1 | - | 2 | - | 5 | - | 9 | 1 |
| Doesn't boast | 6 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 6 | - | 1 |
| Would like to have him/her as a best friend (ML) | 1 (2 ND) | 2 (2 ND) | 2 (1 ST , 3 RD) | 2 (1 ST) | 3 (1 ST , 2 ND , 3 RD) | 2 (1 ST) | 1 (3 RD) | 1 (3 RD) |
| Like him/her the least (LL) | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 4 |
| TOTAL RESPONDENTS | 32 | 32 | 32 | 32 | 30 | 30 | 24 | 24 |

5c. Sociometric Status of Core Informants

| STUDENT | NOMINATIONS | | SOCIOMETRIC STATUS |
|---------|-----------------|------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Most liked (ML) | Least liked (LL) | |
| Olive | 1 | 2 | Average: disliked more than liked |
| Irwin | 2 | 0 | Average: liked |
| Trudy | 2 | 1 | Average: liked |
| Rufus | 2 | 0 | Average : liked more than disliked |
| Velma | 3 | 2 | Average: liked more than disliked |
| Sam | 2 | 0 | Average: liked |
| Petra | 1 | 5 | Rejected: disliked more than liked |
| Wayne | 1 | 4 | Rejected: disliked more than liked |

Based on the number of positive/most liked (ML) or negative/least liked (LL) nominations that the students received they were categorised as popular (stars), average, controversial, rejected or neglected. Popular children are those who receive many positive (≥ 5) and few negative nominations (≤ 1); rejected children receive few positive (≤ 1) and many negative nominations (≥ 5); neglected children receive no positive or negative nominations ($=0$); controversial children receive many positive and negative nominations (≥ 5) and average children are those who receive moderate positive and negative nominations (≥ 3) and do not fit into any of the other groups.

5d. Friendship Groups in Form Three at Southall Secondary School

| Class Group | Males | | | No | Females | | | No | Mixed | | No | Total |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----|----------|----------|-----------|----|-----------|-----------|----|-------|
| 3B | (5) A | (4) B | (4) C | 13 | (4) D | (6) E | (4) F | 14 | (4) F | (3) H | 7 | 34 |
| 3E | (6) I | (4) J | (5) K | 15 | (5) L | (7) M | (3) N | 15 | (5) O | | 5 | 35 |
| 3S | (4) P | (5) Q | (5) R | 14 | (5) S | (6) T | (3) U | 14 | (6) V | | 6 | 34 |
| 3T | (5) W | (4) X | (4) Y | 13 | (7) Z | | (5) AA | 12 | (5) AB | (6) AC | 11 | 36 |
| No of Groups | 12 | | | | 11 | | | | 6 | | | |
| Total No of Students | | | | 55 | | | | 55 | | | 29 | 139 |

NOTES: The number inside each shape represents the number of students in each group
The group name is indicated by the capital letter under each shape.

Specific groups used in the analysis chapters include:

- Group C: Michael's group (3B)
- Group K: Earl's group (3E)
- Group Q: Neville's group (3S)
- Group S: Alvina's group (3S)
- Group T: Bertha's group (3S)
- Group U: Esther's group (3S)
- Group W: Ben's group (3T)

APPENDIX 6: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CORE INFORMANTS

6a. **Extract of Core Informants’ School Report showing Absence and Lateness**

| STUDENT | FORM | TIMES LATE IN FORM 3 | | TIMES ABSENT IN FORM 3 | | ATTITUDE TO AUTHORITY | | APPLICATION TO STUDIES | |
|---------|------|-------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|----------------|
| | | TERM 1 | TERM 2 | TERM 1 | TERM 2 | TERM 1 | TERM 2 | TERM 1 | TERM 2 |
| OLIVE | 3B | 26 | 29 | 4 | 4 | A | A | E | C ⁺ |
| IRWIN | 3B | 4 | 18 | 6 | 1 | A | B | C ⁻ | C ⁻ |
| TRUDY | 3E | 33 | 29 | 7 | 14 | B | B | E | E |
| RUFUS | 3E | 2 | 0 | 3 | 3 | A | A | E | D |
| VELMA | 3S | 11 | 45 | 9 | 7 | A | A | E | C ⁻ |
| SAM | 3S | 13 | 14 | 8 | 3 | A | A | D | C ⁻ |
| PETRA | 3T | 39 | 25 | 14 | 16 | C | C | E | E |
| WAYNE | 3T | 3 | 5 | 1 | 3 | B | B | E | C ⁻ |

6b. Socio-economic Background of Core Informants

| Student | Financial Status | Type of Occupation | Family Type and no of dependants | BR* | No of bread winners | Education level attained S= secondary or lower T= tertiary |
|---------|------------------|--|----------------------------------|-----|---------------------|--|
| Olive | Low Income | Mother was housewife; father worked in the Maintenance in a hotel | Nuclear family 3 | 2 | 1 | Mother- S Father- S |
| Irwin | Middle Income | Father was an architect; Step mother worked as a chef in a hotel | Nuclear family 4 | 4 | 2 | Step mother -T Father- T |
| Trudy | Low Income | Mother works as janitor in a hospital; an older brother works at a hotel | Single parent family 4 | 3 | 1 | Mother- S |
| Sam | Low Income | Mother worked as a Shop Assistant; father worked as a janitor for the City Council | Nuclear family 4 | 3 | 2 | Mother- S Father- S |
| Velma | Low Income | Mother was a house wife; father worked as a Chef in a hotel | Nuclear family 4 | 2 | 1 | Mother- S Father- S |
| Rufus | Low Income | Mother worked as a Shop Keeper in a shop owned by Rufus' uncle | Single parent family 3 | 2 | 1 | Mother - S |
| Petra | Low Income | Mother worked as a Kitchen Assistant in a restaurant | Single parent family 6 | 1 | 1 | Mother - S |
| Wayne | Middle Income | Mother worked as a Head Supervisor at a Petrol Station/ Shop | Single parent family 1 | 2 | 1 | Mother- T |

*NOTE: BR represents the number of bedroom for use by the family which may not necessarily be the total number of bedrooms in the property (BP) (see Table 6c)

6c. Demographic and Geographic Background of Core Informants

| STUDENT | APPROX. DISTANCE FROM SCHOOL (KM) | LOCATION WITHIN DISTRICT | APPROX. HOUSE SIZE (SQUARE FEET) Bedrooms in the property (BR/P) | SETTLEMENT TYPE HOUSING PATTERN | LAND OWNERSHIP | FAMILY COMPOSITION |
|---------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Olive | 7 | NE OF (HVD) | 300 Flat painted wooden house (2BR/P) | Small rural settlement; houses are fairly dispersed haphazardly with tracks or(unpaved) roads to homes | Individually owned (purchased) | Lived with mother, step father, younger sister and baby brother; was eldest child in the family; had another sister by step father and approximately six siblings by biological father; kept in contact with biological father |
| Irwin | 9 | NE OF (HVD) | 1300 Painted Concrete house built on concrete columns (4BR/P) | Large rural settlement(≥2000 inhabitants) developed area with fairly dispersed housing patterns located on flat hill crest | Shared family land (not purchased) | Lived with father, step mother, two younger brothers and a baby sister; was a middle child- had other siblings by biological mother and father; kept in contact with biological mother |
| Trudy | 11 | S OF (HVD) | 300 Unpainted wooden house partly anchored on stilts (3BR/P) | Clustered rural settlement on city outskirts; built haphazardly with unpaved roads/tracks to homes; hilly area | Government owned i.e. (crown lands) squatter (not purchased) | Lived with mother and three older brothers; two older sisters lived on their own; was youngest child in family; had no contact with biological father; church pastor functioned as surrogate father |
| Sam | 18 | SW OF (HVD) | 480 Unpainted wooden house partly anchored on stilts (3BR/P) | Small rural settlement; houses are very dispersed (isolated) with tracks to homes; hilly area | Government owned i.e. (crown lands) squatter (not purchased) | Lived with father, mother, two younger brothers and youngest sister; was eldest in the family; had one brother by mother and many other siblings by father |
| Velma | 8 | NE OF (HVD) | 300 Unpainted wooden house partly anchored on stilts (2BR/P) | Small rural settlement; houses are very dispersed (isolated)with tracks to homes; hilly area | Individually owned (purchased) | Lived with father, mother, an older step brother and younger step brother by mother and a younger baby brother; was the only female child in her family |

| STUDENT | APPROX. DISTANCE FROM SCHOOL (KM) | LOCATION WITHIN DISTRICT | APPROX. HOUSE SIZE (SQUARE FEET) Bedrooms in the property (BR/P) | SETTLEMENT TYPE HOUSING PATTERN | LAND OWNERSHIP | FAMILY COMPOSITION |
|---------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Rufus | 9 | E OF (HVD) | 1100 Three floor wooden house (5BR/P) | Clustered urban settlement on edge of city with tracks leading to property | Government owned i.e. (Crown lands) squatter (not purchased) | Lived with mother and two younger step sisters on the middle floor of a two floor family house; had little contact with biological father; uncle's family lived in basement and grandmother's family lived on top floor |
| Petra | 6 | NW OF (SVD) | 1200 Flat painted wooden /concrete house (4BR/P) | Urban town settlement; house clustered in linear pattern along road/street | Individually owned property (shared housing) | Lived with mother and five siblings with another extended family; household consisted of 17 members; was the eldest girl of her mother; had an older brother by mother who was away and whom she had not seen in 13 years; had no contact or relationship with father |
| Wayne | 16 | SW OF (HVD) | 700 Concrete building flat (2BR/P) | Small rural settlement; houses are fairly dispersed with tracks or (unpaved) roads to homes | Shared family land (not purchased by parents | Lived with grandmother who brought him up ; was an only child like his mother had been; had frequent contacts with mother who lived approximately 7 km away from grandmother |

NOTES:

- The students' home background can be differentiated in terms of the house size; distance from the school; location within the district; the type of settlement; housing pattern and the land ownership.
- The core informants were drawn from two adjacent districts, namely Sea View District (SVD) and Harbour Vale District (HVD). One of the core informants lived in Sea View District and the other seven students lived in different settlements in various parts of Harbour Vale District. The school is located in the South East of Sea view District.
- It is customary for individuals from low income families to build their homes instead of paying for rented accommodation and tended to build small wooden houses on Crown Lands. Crown lands refer to land belonging to the government. Those who built houses on this land did so illegally without permission from the government, a practice known as squatting. On the contrary it was more customary for middle income individuals to live in rented accommodation, and build their own home later.